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THE
PERSIAN ADVENTURER:

BEING

THE SEQUEL

OF

“THE KUZZILBASH;”

BY J. B. FRAZER, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF A TOUR TO THE HIMĀLĀ MOUNTAINS;
TRAVELS IN PERSIA, &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE PERSIAN ADVENTURER.

CHAPTER I.

A REVERSE.

WELL saith the sage Lókman, "Trust thou if thou wilt in him who has learned in the school of adversity; but give me for my friend the man who hath endured the test of prosperity." During the earlier stages of Nadir's career, his course of victory and success had been so much chequered by difficulties and reverses, that the resources of his great mind, and the better qualities of his nature, were kept in continual exercise; and even after his authority had been generally recognised, the turbulent character of the greater part of his subjects, and the restless disposition of his neigh-

bours, proved a powerful restraint upon his less amiable tendencies; as a regard to his own security prevented him from rashly disgusting any of those adherents, who were useful in maintaining his authority, by undue severity or arrogance.

It was not until all opposition was conquered; all rebellion quelled; all malcontents either silenced or subdued, and the wide realm of Iraun lay prostrate and powerless at his feet, that, conscious of the unlimited authority with which his vast abilities and unexampled success had armed him, he suffered the evil propensities of his nature to betray themselves. His sagacity, forecast, and vigilance; his fortitude, firmness, and presence of mind; nay, his temperance, his hardihood, and simplicity of personal habits, remained unabated; for these were all the native, uneradicable qualities of his mind, or had by long habit become entwined with it, until they were a part of his nature. But that vigilance and forecast had gradually become tinctured with suspicion and with jealousy, and his firmness and severity of discipline had increased or rather degenerated into harshness and cruelty.

But this was not the worst feature of the change. The success of his bold enterprise against Hindostan, the facility of his conquest, and the astounding mass of plunder and riches which it threw so unexpectedly into his grasp, tended in-

calculably on the one hand to excite the arrogance of successful ambition, and on the other to develop and nourish with fatal rapidity the hitherto latent seeds of avarice—that gloomy and absorbing passion, which lurks perhaps in some dark corner of every human breast.

The first of these evils, or at least its effects, were repressed or counterbalanced for a season by the acuteness of his judgment and the vigour of his powerful mind ; but when once the foul demon of avarice has been suffered to lift its voice in the soul, what mortal is able to silence its vicious suggestions? Unhappily it took full possession of Nadir's breast ; it irritated and increased every other bad propensity ; it instigated him, who, though stern and rigid, was yet naturally just and upright, to the most atrocious crimes, and was finally the cause of his ruin.

The first symptoms of this rabid disease evinced themselves after the battle of Kurnaul, excited doubtless by the unexpectedly large plunder of the Indian camp. The expectations so insanelly excited by some of the Indian omrahs regarding the amount of subsidy or peishcush likely to be wrung from the court of Dehlee as a ransom from sack and pillage, fostered this thirst for riches ; and it was raised to its height by the possession of the whole treasury, plate, and jewels of the emperor and his nobles, together with the enor-

mous plunder of the capital itself; all of which in the end fell into the conqueror's hands. The sight and the possession of such unimagined riches was too much even for the powerful mind of Nadir; and it is impossible to doubt that his judgment was obscured and his brain in some degree turned by it. Bewildering chimeras of boundless wealth took possession of his imagination, and hardened his heart to the means of acquiring it. This it was which made him disregard, if he did not direct, the cruelties committed in the collections at Dehlee, and which betrayed him into all the disgraceful atrocities which followed.

No sooner had the army quitted Dehlee, than two general orders were issued, which produced great discontent. The first, commanding the restoration to their friends of all Indian women, even although regularly married, has already been adverted to: it was a measure contrary to the general usage in such cases, and considered as an unwarrantable interference with the soldier's right of plunder.

The other proclaimed that all jewels taken at Dehlee, and estimated above a certain value, were to be considered as the property of the crown; and in order that the crown should not be defrauded, it enjoined every individual to declare what jewels he had in his possession.

An order of so peremptory a nature, impinging

more directly upon the soldier's hard-earned gains, created a still wider alarm ; and it is easy to suppose that every possible means were resorted to for defeating an inquiry so odious. Accordingly, but few discoveries were made at first; and many persons entertained hopes that they had for ever escaped the danger of losing their property.

But not thus was Nadir to be baffled. While passing the river Chunab near Seyalkote, which, after the destruction of the bridge he had constructed, was effected by boats, he directed a search so rigorous, that it was next to impossible to elude it. A guard, consisting of the most trusty and devoted men and officers, was established at this ferry, with orders to search all baggage and every individual as they passed, without any distinction of rank whatsoever. Officers and men were alike subjected to this unpleasant ceremony, which was most rigorously performed, and which consequently delayed the progress of the army for many days.

By this means, undoubtedly, a large amount of jewels and treasure was added to the royal khuzaneh (treasury); for many persons, particularly among the officers, unwilling to become objects of suspicion or ill-will, or dreading the consequences of discovery, voluntarily surrendered such jewels as they possessed. A number of others were found either upon the persons of individuals, or buried in

the straw of the pack-saddles belonging to mules, horses, or camels, or sewed into stuffed garments and padded caps, or in various other ways concealed; and when such intention of concealment was discovered after the publication of the order, the whole property of the individual, whether falling under the description prescribed in that order or not, was seized and confiscated.

But while much property was thus acquired by the crown, a still greater amount was lost to the army at large; for many persons, in hopes of eluding the search, buried their property and plunder, intending to return and recover it when the inquiry should have ceased. But this being entirely prevented by the shah's arrangements, it remained, and ever will remain, in the earth from whence it was originally taken, of use to no one. Others again, indignant at the rapacity which sought to deprive faithful and zealous servants of their well-earned property, openly or secretly threw the whole of it into the river.

But the shah, not contented with this exact and invidious search, had recourse to still severer methods for discovering hidden jewels. Whoever was suspected of concealing such valuables, be his rank what it might, was seized and beaten, or otherwise tortured, in order to force him into surrendering them. Many men, and even officers of rank, were by these means lamed or maimed,

according to the caprice of his majesty, or the dispositions of the officials who acted by his orders.

These severe inquisitions increased rather than diminished in frequency during our march from Seyalkote to the banks of the Jylum. A number of men were put to death upon mere suspicion, and several officers shamefully disgraced. Some persons, suspected of swallowing valuable stones, in order that they might elude discovery during the search, were subjected to the harshest treatment for the recovery of the jewels; and in not a few instances, when suspicion was strong, the unhappy creatures were actually put to death, and ripped open upon the chance of finding the missing gems.

Such inhuman and tyrannical rapacity could not fail of producing a deep disgust in the minds of all the army; and there cannot be a stronger proof of the astonishing degree of moral restraint which this extraordinary man had established over an army, so numerous and heterogeneous in its composition, than their supine endurance of measures so obnoxious in themselves, and carried into execution by means of atrocities so disgusting. Daring as was every individual in camp, in the face of an enemy, to rebel,—to resist the command of his general and king, never entered into the thoughts of either officer or man; and surrounded as they were by fierce and hostile tribes, to fly,—to

desert, was impossible ; they had only to submit and endure.

The same system, maintained by a succession of similar acts, continued during the whole of our rapid march along the skirts of the hilly country, to Rawil Pundee, at which town the army halted for a day. It was at this, to me, most memorable spot, that a change of the most painful and important nature occurred in my condition ; a change which, at the time, threatened me with utter destruction, and which continued for a long time to influence most disastrously my prospects in life.

There are epochs doubtless in the lives of men, when the star of their fortune shines forth with happy radiance, and the eye of their protecting angels vigilates over them with unwearied care. At such times every undertaking is certain to succeed ; every fresh exertion is but a further step towards happiness and honour : but there are also seasons when malignant influences cloud that favouring star ; when good angels slumber, and spirits of evil have power over the darkened fate, and then the cup of human life is tinged with bitterness ; the best meant efforts fail, and every step that is taken proves but a deeper plunge into misfortune ; and such evil influences surely prevailed over my destiny on this day.

On the evening of our halt at Rawil Pundee,

having performed my round of duty, I repaired to the pavilion of audience : on approaching which I failed not to remark the tokens, of late but too frequent, of the bloody scenes which were proceeding within the inclosure. Some were issuing from the entrance, staggering like drunken men, bruised and maimed under the blows they had received ; others, with blood streaming from their mutilated countenances, or led, with blinded and bleeding eyes, to grope their cheerless way in darkness henceforth through the world. One or two strangled bodies lay outside the entrance ; and I was not a little startled, as well as shocked, to observe among the sufferers more than one of the Affshar soldiers, who were followers, and under especial command of my brother-in-law, Noor Mahomed.

With a heart soured and sickened by these painful objects, I entered the inclosure, and soon found myself in presence of the shah, who was still engaged in examining and passing sentence on criminals. What was my horror at observing among those who stood in this condition before him, with arms bound and in charge of the furushes, that very dear friend, my brother, Noor Mahomed !

Shocked and confounded as I was, I had sufficient presence of mind to refrain from imprudent

remarks ; but turning to an officer who stood near me, I requested to know of what crime the men at that time before his majesty were accused. To my further amazement, I was informed that my brother-in-law was one among several others who were suspected of having secreted a very valuable *jika* or *aigrette* of diamonds belonging to the Begum Malikeh-ul-zumaneh, the principal wife of the Emperor Mahomed, and which in some way or other had been smuggled out of the imperial treasury at Dehlee.

The absurdity of such a charge against one so upright and high-spirited as Noor Mahomed, and with whose every act and every possession I was intimately acquainted, came home to me with greater force doubtless than to others ; and the indignation which filled me was still more exasperated by hearing the manner in which the examination was conducted. Direct proof was not even attempted : two wretched fellows, the one a dishonest writer, the other a common *furosh*, endeavoured to substantiate a story of having overheard a conversation which criminated Noor Mahomed, uniting him in the fact with certain of his own soldiers. A few simple questions were sufficient to throw these false witnesses into confusion and contradiction ; but when the judge himself is biassed evidence becomes nugatory. Nadir, resolved upon dis-

covering the missing jewel, gave orders that the bastinado should be inflicted upon all the accused until the truth should be elicited.

On hearing this order I could contain myself no longer : “ May it please your majesty,” said I, stepping forward with the customary obeisance, “ that man is my brother-in-law, the husband of my sister ; he is innocent, my lord ; and I pledge myself to prove not only this, but also that his accusers are villanous knaves, whose testimony does not merit the smallest attention. They have eaten their own abomination, and deserve the fate which they seek to draw down upon others.”

But Nadir, irritated by disappointment, and rendered suspicious by the calumnies of a perjured informer, was in no temper to listen to reason, or bear such a remonstrance :—“ And whose vile dog art thou ?” growled he, bending his terrible brows against me, “ that hast the audacity to interpose thy vile howling between the shah’s just award and a convicted criminal ? Be wise, fool, in time, and retire, lest ye share his punishment ! Brother, forsooth ! probably the partner in his treasonable dishonesty.”

“ May I be your sacrifice !” replied I : “ the name of your slave is Ismael, who has had the honour to follow and serve your majesty with unabated zeal for these many years, even since before the taking of Mushed and the defeat of Malek

Mahmood Seistanee (on whose soul be confusion !) until this present hour. Much of his blood has he shed for your majesty in that time ; but when has he been known to defile himself with the filth of falsehood or theft ?”

“ By the head of the shah !” exclaimed Nadir, in rising wrath, “ this ghorumsaug taunts us with his services, and would set up for our counsellor ; ay, and censor, too. Mash-Allah !—it is by his consent and approval—God help us !—that our prisoners and culprits are henceforth to stand acquitted or condemned :—we had thought ourselves something in this camp ; but lo ! we are less than nothing—we have not a word to say.” I was about to make some observation of a conciliatory nature to allay if possible this unlooked-for ebullition of fury, but the time was unlucky ; my happy star was obscured, and the frown darkened on the king’s forehead as he interrupted me in a voice of thunder :—“ What ! would the unclean dog still bark ?—Silence, thou hound without shame, or by the king’s soul thy tongue shall take leave of thy mouth ere thou canst howl again !—Seize him, furoshes !—hold him whilst he witnesses his well-beloved brother and coadjutor receive the reward of his practices : we may then consider his own deserts.”

At these words the furoshes, having torn the military accoutrements and dress from the back of

my unhappy brother, laid upon it mercilessly with rattan canes, which drew skin and blood at every stroke, until between pain, indignation and shame, he fainted upon the spot.

“What! is the unclean dog dead?” said Nadir, who during the execution had been talking unconcernedly with some of the officers near him, until his attention had been recalled by the cessation of the stripes and of my brother’s groans:—“Good!—we are well rid of such traitors; drag him out and toss the carrion into the next hole;—and as for his worthy brother and comrade here, strip from his back the garments he has disgraced, and turn him out of camp: let him not appear within its precincts if he values his eyes; ay, or his worthless life:—and hark! the goods of both are escheated to the crown:—let a nassakchee be sent forthwith to seize them: let no favour be shown: let it be seen whether the shah’s countenance or the friendship of a traitor is best worth retaining:—these are your orders—the shah has said it.”

Had the peaks of Hindoo-Coosh themselves, which lifted their heads at a distance, fallen upon me at the moment, I could not have been more confounded, more utterly crushed down, than I was by the issue of this short but eventful scene, which passed with a rapidity that mocked all calculation or foresight. Before my brain had in

the least thrown off the stunning weight of the shock it had received, my coat and arms were torn from me, and I was hurried from the presence beyond the inclosure of royal tents ; and while yet staggering like one who has received a violent blow, I saw two furoshes dragging out by the heels the body of my wretched mangled brother, Noor Mahomed.

Like others, so far at least as my bewildered senses could take in the impression of external objects, I had believed him dead ; but when the unfeeling executors of the tyrant's will threw down the carcass, as they believed it, on the ground, I thought I saw it move : the rough usage of the furoshes had awakened the slumbering spark of life : he groaned, and opened his eyes. I flew to him, and lifting him in my arms, carried him to one side, and sitting down on the ground, laid the body on my lap, and placed his head upon my bosom. The action was observed by one of the guards on duty, who instantly called out :—“ Holla, there ! the nassakchees must be clumsy dogs ; they hav'n't half done their business ; there's one of the dead men come to life, and another of the fellows is carrying him off ;—give them a call to finish their work.”

I trembled at these words, and cast a glance around to see if there was no mode of saving my poor recovering brother ; but it was already too

late ; for a nassakchee with two of his men came instantly from within the serpurdehs at the call of the sentinel, and running up to me, ordered one of his assistants to complete the business with his heavy mace. It was a moment of intense horror. I thought all was over ; when, looking in the nassakchee's face, my hope revived ; for I recollected him well, and guarding my brother with my arm, immediately addressed him :—" Dost Allee," said I, " thou rememberest to whom thou owest thy first promotion ; prove thy gratitude now :—spare this broken reed ; there is no order of the king's against his life. I have no reward to offer thee ; but God will reward the merciful ; and thou knowest that the head which is now in the dust may yet wear a cap of brocade. Leave us, friend, as though thou hadst not remarked us."

The nassakchee, recognising my voice, looked aghast for a moment. My appeal was successful ; for a sign stayed the club of the furosh ; but such is the pestilential atmosphere which floats around a disgraced man, that he did not dare to look at me a second time : he retired without a word ; and I felt that it was perhaps the best service he could have rendered me.

This danger being past, the next consideration was how to dispose of my poor suffering brother. My own tent was at some distance ; and long before I could get there, little of it would in all

probability be standing ; for well did I know how active in the discharge of such duties were the officers of justice, or rather of his majesty's pleasure ; and yet to remain where I was could neither be long safe nor practicable.

Necessity sharpens wit. With a portion of the rags which yet hung about my person, I made shift to cover my brother's bleeding shoulders, and once more lifting him, no longer molested by the guards, nor much regarded by the crowd of comers and goers to the royal durbar, I made shift to carry him beyond the precincts of the maidaun, where the artillery were drawn up in front of the shah's pavilions. By the time I had reached the first division of tents beyond the royal quarters Noor Mahomed faintly informed me that he should now he believed be able to walk ; and setting him upon his legs accordingly, I found that with my support he was just enabled to make very slow way along the line.

Aware how swiftly ill news spreads, I was unwilling to risk the chance of repulse, or even more positive ill treatment, by applying to any of those who had been my friends while in prosperity ; neither did I think it wise to place myself in the way of discovery even from the soldiers to whom I might be known. I had observed an old heap of stones, the ruins of a small building, which might have been a water-tank or tomb, no matter which.

Of the whole mass there was but one vault remaining above ground ; and I thought, if haply unoccupied, it might suffice to protect my brother from the night air until some place of retreat to a more convenient asylum could be arranged.

To this ruin therefore we directed our steps ; but it was not unoccupied. An Affghaun horse-keeper in the service of our officers had taken up his abode there, and had spread his coarse horse-cloth in one corner of the little vault. The urgency of our case, however, made me bold : leaving my brother at two or three paces distance, I entered, gave the salute of peace, and received the customary return in a rough but good-humoured voice. I told the occupant that I was a traveller, and had with me a sick brother ; that we had been maltreated by certain plunderers from the camp ; that I had succeeded in bringing him on thus far ; but that he could proceed no further ; and I begged him to give us a share of his cell for the night.

The man looked hard at my disordered dress, which gave some colour to my story ; and after a moment's pause, he said, " In the name of God, enter ! we are not uncharitable infidels : bring in the man." I did so accordingly, and he cast another scrutinising look upon us both ; when, as misfortune would have it, the rags fell from my brother's shoulders, and exposed their whealed and

bloody condition. "Ah ! Yaftim ! I comprehend—I see the affair ; but no matter :—have no fear—you are safe for me. Ay, safer here perhaps than in these grand tents. No one can call Ghuzzab Mehter a cowardly tell-tale. Come, sit down—bismillah ! Here, take part of this numud ;" and the good-natured fellow insisted upon Noor Mahomed reclining upon part of his horse-cloth.

"Perhaps, my friend, you are not far wrong," said I, willing to make a friend of him by a show of confidence, and to put the best face upon our unhappy flight : "but I am sure that you are as you say, too good a fellow to kick down an unhappy wretch who has already had a fall which he never deserved."—"Ah, God help us ! there are but too many in the same evil case, sir, now-a-days ; but I swear by the holy Kaabah and my father's tomb, that no ill shall befall you from me. Here, take a whiff of this calleeoon ; it will comfort you,—so."—"But this poor fellow needs some help, you see," said I : "let him just stay here while I go and procure it for him. I will not be long."—"In God's name, he is welcome ! but perhaps I may get you what is wanted at the bazar there : yonder, just at the turn of that line of tents."—"There is a bazar close by then ?—Good, I will go myself."—"But stay, your clothes—your looks will betray you. Here, wrap this coarse felt cloak about you :—it will

cover all these rags, and in the dusk no one will remark you.”—“May God reward you and prosper you for your kindness, good friend!” said I; and throwing the grey joobba over my tattered clothes, I took the way with all speed to the quarter where my own and Noor Mahomed’s tents had been pitched.

My own being nearest, I reached it first; or rather the place where it had stood. I had not over-rated the zeal and rapidity of the nassakchee’s movements. The tents, already struck, were in the act of being rolled up under the inspection of two or three of the royal tent-pitchers, and all the rest of my property, including my share of plunder; all arms, utensils, furniture, clothes and valuables were in process of being inventoried on behalf of the king, or had already found owners; for in such cases, as the measure itself is more often an act of plunder than of justice, and is performed in a corresponding manner by ruffians fitted to the duty, the portion of goods which reaches the royal toshik-khaneh is generally but small.

A great uproar there was, and no small confusion among the crowd of officials who were engaged in the affair, and the idle gazers that were attracted by it. The increasing dusk of a September evening favoured me as I glided unobserved among them, intending if possible to rescue something

from the wreck : but they had been too quick for me : a few scattered articles of dress, and a sword in a coarse scabbard, which appeared to have been thrown aside as worthless, were all that I could get hold of. But I rejoiced over the sword ; for it was a true and very valuable Herât blade of the old temper, although plainly mounted, and had been a token of my master's kindness in former days, when every thing I did found favour in his eyes, and he valued the zeal that watched his every glance, and would even prevent his orders, be the hazard what it might, beyond the glitter of jewels, and the wealth of Shahjehanabad.—I sighed as a thought of these days of high enthusiasm and generous, frankly yielded applause came over my mind. But time pressed.—“ My luck is but small here,” thought I, recovering myself : “ let us try another department :” and I ran to the place where my horses were picketed.

But here also I had been forestalled : my stout Toorkoman chargers ; my Arab steed of the real Nejidee breed ; my beautiful Dekhinee, a true Bheematullee,* which had been the parting present of my friend Allee Verdee Beg ; all were already in the hands of the shah's jeloodars, or of the nassakchee's attendants. I could not stoop to beg, although the use of an animal to carry my

* A district in the Deccan in India, celebrated for its fine breed of horses.

wounded brother-in-law was absolutely necessary : another idea struck me.—Of my own particular followers, there were some furnished with horses and yaboos belonging to me, which were always picketed with a corps of troops under my immediate command, not far from my quarters. Hither I went, and found as I expected, that on hearing the news of what was passing at the tents of their commander, most of the men had run off towards the scene of pillage ; so that the horses were left unattended. A stout yaboo stood ready saddled and bridled, along with some others, to be ready in case of a call : availing myself of the bad look-out, and of my own resemblance in dress to that of some of the horse-keepers, I deliberately cast off the head and heel-ropes, by which he was fastened, and leading him out of the line, was on his back in a moment. One of the men seeing this act, which was somewhat premature, took the alarm, and called out to me ; but before he could take any effectual step to stop me I had clapped my heels to the beast's sides, and was out of his sight in the darkness.

I now rode cautiously in the direction of Noor Mahomed's tents ; but a glance was enough to show me that the pillage there had been to the full as complete : so, unwilling to lose more time, or to encounter bootless risk, I rode through the camp to a bazar at some distance,—for there were

regular bazars established in each quarter of the encampment—in order to supply myself with what was requisite both for the cure of my brother's wounds and for clothing him and myself decently. In a camp full of plunder, which was constantly changing hands, this was not a matter of difficulty when the means of payment were forthcoming, and these I fortunately possessed. A secret pocket beneath the left arm of my ulcaluc, or vest, had escaped the hasty violence of the furoshes at the audience tent, who, expecting no plunder upon my person, had done no more than comply with the orders of his majesty; and in this pocket there was a parcel containing about thirty ashurfees or gold mohrs of India, which it was my custom to carry about with me for any sudden occasion.

Taking forth one of these coins, I passed by the more tempting and gaudy array of brave Indian silks, and muslins, and brocades, or the more gorgeous dresses of the Moghul nobles, which were to be seen in almost every sutler's shop, and went on to an obscure booth, where some coarse shirts and cloaks of the country were exposed, hung up along with other meaner wares. A bargain was soon struck for two Affghaun shirts and pairs of trousers, with two cloaks of brown felt, such as are worn by the peasantry; and two turbans of striped cotton cloth, for which I gave some part of my own recovered clothes, and re-

ceived back a few rupees in change of my gold mohr. Besides this, I purchased from a pansaree* some application for relieving the pain of a bruise; and thus prepared, I returned to the ruined retreat of my Affghaun horse-keeper.

The inmates were startled at the sound of my horse's feet; but the kind-hearted mehtur was rejoiced at my success. "We must try," said he, "to conceal this yaboo in the hole where I have stowed my ass, and that honest beast must have his share of our cell for the short time ye can remain here. But this is no fit place of safety; and you must leave it with all possible dispatch. But see! this poor fellow is in pain—we must try to give him some relief.—Ah! no;—these things are of no use:—leave the business to me. I have had a bastinadoing myself in my time, and have learned how to cure it. Do you keep quiet here, and in a moment I will bring the very thing you want."

Leaving the cell accordingly, he returned after a few minutes' absence with a large bundle of fresh-pulled leaves, which he put along with some water into his brass cooking pot, and placed upon a fire which had been lighted to prepare his evening meal. When properly boiled he took the leaves soaked in their liquor, and fomented the bruises all over, continuing the operation for more than a quarter of an hour. At first it was attended

* Druggist.

with great pain ; for the muscles had become stiff and sore, and the application did not fail to smart the wounded flesh ; but after a while the genial heat and moisture relaxed the parts, and produced a soothing effect so astonishing, that Noor Mahomed declared he felt comparatively well.

“Ah ! it is a capital thing certainly for a bruised back ; and a clever rogue of an old Soonyassee* he was who gave me the secret in India. That was not the only thing he could cure, nor the only trick he knew ; but you are not to expect this swelled flesh or that poor peeled skin to be well all at once : the pain will return, and you must repeat the same thing again, until all swelling and stiffness shall be gone ; and see ! here is the leaf :—the tree is common enough here. But now, what are your plans ?”—I professed my utter want of any :—I had not had time even to think of them. —“To tell you the truth, friend, we were soldiers, and favoured ones, in the camp only this morning ; but the shah having thought fit to suspect us of loving Hindostanee jewels better than his service, took this mode of informing us he could dispense with our presence ; so, finding he needs our services no longer, we would willingly shape a course which might carry us back in as much safety as may be to our own villages, with bare backs and

* One of the castes of wandering Hindoo religious beggars.

empty pockets:—all, forsooth, we are likely to gain by this grand expedition.”

“Ha! by the beard of Omar I guessed something like it: your case is not a solitary one; and between ourselves, there is many an Iraunee who will give his majesty the slip between this place and Candahar; all, at least, who wish to keep hold of a single piceworth of their hard-gotten gains; for, by the bones of my father, every one of them will be sucked like an orange before they pass the Urgund-áb. But, after all, what is to be done?—your friend can neither march nor fly as he is; and you won’t leave him here I take it?”

“No, certainly,” replied I; “if a safe retreat could be had for some days, in the town for instance, until the army should have passed on, we could then perhaps make shift: they move in the morning, and all stragglers would be gone before three days, surely.”—“No, no; not in the town; they would never receive you there. And besides, God knows what may happen to the town itself yet; a single suspicion of harbouring stragglers or persons under the royal displeasure would, as you must know, give it up in a moment to plunder. Stay—I have it; about a mile south of the town, in a little grove of mango trees, there is an old half-ruined tomb, which is held sacred hereabouts, and is called ‘Cudum Allee Shah.’ An old fakeer has taken up his quarters in it; and if you were to go

as if you intended to perform religious duties for the recovery of your sick friend, and give the fakeer some trifle for feeding you, I doubt not you might remain there in peace; for there is nothing in the place to tempt birds of prey to take a flight that way."

"It is the very thing, my friend; the very place for us; but how are we to get there?—that's the point; for the sooner we are away from hence the better, both for your sake and ours: perhaps after a little refreshment, and when the camp gets still, you might finish your charitable work, and guide two unfortunate fellows yourself:—the blessing of God—"—"Ay, the blessing of God, indeed! but what if my ass, and all I have, should chance to be stolen while I am about this act of charity?—But stay, perhaps I can manage it."—"Ay, that you can, if you will, good friend; what should hinder it when the troops have gone to rest? they won't be stirring till the drum beats, I'll engage for it; and you sha'n't want for reward altogether; here's a good gold piece shall be yours the moment we get sight of the Cudum Allee Shah."—"Pah! gold piece!—nonsense; a pretty charitable job it would be to rob a poor fellow who has just lost his place, and all he had in the world, of the only bit of gold that may ever bless his fingers; for it's my belief you have not another of these good-looking ashurfees about

you : no—that would be more in the line of one of your knavish old fakeers, and you had best keep it for the old fellow at the cudum :—but stay ; he'll hardly know the colour of gold ; give him some silver ; he would be smelling something wrong if you bribed him too high.—But I am forgetting that you are hungry all this time ; we must get you something good for to-night, for you may fare badly enough to-morrow.”

I insisted on adding my trifle for the additional expense, and the good-natured fellow went out to make his purchases, leaving my brother-in-law and myself alone in the cell. It was the first tranquil moment which had occurred since the terrible occurrence of this eventful evening ; an occurrence, which in a single instant had effected a change in my fortune no less complete than sudden ; and so stunning had been the means by which this change was effected, that I could not immediately comprehend its whole extent or consequences. I could not in a moment figure myself poor, destitute, humiliated, dishonoured ; hurled down at one blow from high distinction and extensive command, to absolute penury and utter helplessness ; from the enjoyment of warm and numerous and noble friends, to almost total desertion in a distant and a hostile land !

Heavy as the effects of such a blow must in all cases be, they fell upon my brother and myself

with greatly aggravated force. If the anger of a mighty king, whose will is fate, and whose very eye conveys the mandates of life and death, of prosperity or destruction, can crush the illustrious and the noble, can deprive them of fortune or life, and breathe around them an atmosphere which makes them hateful to those who once loved and caressed them—if such be the effect of royal displeasure on men blessed with family, and friends, and name, how infinitely more annihilating must it prove to those possessing none of these advantages—whose fortune and whose hopes rested solely on the favour of that monarch who had long sustained them with his gracious smiles; but who now thought fit to spurn them from him, helpless, amidst a host of enemies? To Noor Mahomed and myself what was Persia itself without the favour of its king? We had no kindred, no tribe, no powerful chief to cling to; Nadir had been all-in-all to us; and he now not only shook us off himself, but had denounced his wrath on all who should harbour us. Still Persia was our only home; the sole objects of our desires were centred there. But how to reach that loved yet distant land, alone and abandoned as we were among fierce and hostile tribes? The more the real nature of our condition dawned upon our minds the darker did the prospect appear; yet the full consequences of our misfortune were only to

be estimated, like the value of those blessings we had lost, by sad experience.

Happy was it for me that the years of my prosperity had also been years of energetic action, which had increased rather than diminished the hardihood of my early life: my frame was more vigorous, and my mind more powerful and fertile in resources than formerly, in proportion to my increased experience in the ways of mankind; and perhaps at no period of my life should I have been more equal to the emergency in which I was so unexpectedly placed—an emergency which certainly promised to require every energy I might possess, and which, at the time, I must confess, had almost overpowered my resolutions.

A crowd of such reflections forced themselves tumultuously upon me as I sat in the dim cell, silent and thoughtful; for the mind is a busy thing, and will flit through a wide world of its own formation in a very little time. Noor Mahomed was probably engaged in similar cogitations, although the state of sick depression into which his sufferings had thrown him tinged his thoughts and anticipations, no doubt, with a darker hue. But rousing himself a little, after a while, and uttering some groans of mingled mental and bodily anguish, he began to bemoan the fate which, as he would have it, my love for him had drawn upon me. “Why,” said he, “would you interfere

between a tyrant and his victim? He who seeks to rend the deer from a tiger's fangs is sure to be hurt by its claws. You have drawn down ruin on yourself, my dear Ismael, without doing me any good."

"Content yourself, Noor Mahomed," replied I: "it was my fate, and therefore not to be avoided. Shall a tyrant bely his nature?—shall he learn justice and humanity?—No; it was your turn then, and would, no doubt, have been mine some days later; for think you that the unworthy suspicion which alighted upon you to-day would long have spared your brother? No, no; better, far better to know one's fate, and brave the worst it has in store, than live in doubt and in danger, as we all have done more or less of late."—"Alas!" said he, "who will now protect your own Shireen and my poor Hoosseinee?—What safety will there be for them when our disgrace shall be known?"—"Stafferullah!—that is too true!" exclaimed I, for a sudden qualm shot through me at the bare thought of what might happen to our unhappy wives, if the story of our misfortune should reach Mushed before ourselves. "I see their danger; but what then?—God is great!—He will do as seems good to his providence; but nevertheless we must see to prevent mischief: our object is to cross the country as fast as possible, and snatch them from the danger before it can reach them.

If, inchallah ! we reach Herât unmolested—” —
“Ay, inchallah !” echoed he; “ but where is Herât ? and where Rawil Pundee, with all the wild Affghauns and Hazarehs, and a hundred tribes of savage Eeliauts between ? And as for me, when, in God’s name, shall I be able to travel ?”

“ Pshah ! man, don’t talk so gloomily—never despond : what is written, must be.—And see ! yonder my star shines still in the heavens, although these confounded clouds do flit over her bright and lovely face ;” and I gazed at the beautiful eagle of the sky ; and as its clear radiance shot every now and then through the light shifting clouds, my heart felt gladdened at the sight. But all at once a heavy dark mass sailed on, and swept away, as it seemed, the very place and habitation of my guiding planet. In spite of all my efforts to be cheerful, I felt my spirits sink at this evil omen ; nor could the view of a pure bright sky behind, from which the clouds had fled, and were fast sinking in the west, revive them. I gazed on without speaking another word, until our kind host returned with the materials of a savoury repast, which was soon prepared ; and we all proceeded to discuss it.

There are few men of sound constitutions and youthful appetites, however oppressed with care, who after a long fast are quite insensible to the comforts of a plentiful meal, and the influence of

a cheerful fire in the deepening gloom of a chill evening. Our hunger being appeased, and the kindly feelings of repletion being enhanced by the exhilarating fumes of a well-filled calleeoon, the prospect began to brighten a little, and I could have conversed somewhat more at ease upon the subjects most interesting to us. But the mehtur, rising, informed me that his duty now called him to his charge, where a comrade had till then taken his place beside the horses. "After every thing has been arranged for the night," continued he, "and the jeloodars have made their rounds, I will get my comrade to resume his charge for an hour or two, which will enable me to put you on your way to the cudum; your friend shall ride my ass; it is an easy beast, and may as well go with us as run the risk of being stolen if left here. I shall be back, inchallah! long enough before the jeloodar returns in the morning." These observations recalled my attention to our immediate situation, and reminded me of the steps to be taken that very night. So, after ministering, as far as I could, to the comfort of my suffering brother, we both laid ourselves down to seek for a little repose, until the re-appearance of our kind guide.

CHAPTER II.

THE RETREAT.

IT wanted an hour of midnight when the mehtur entered the cell, and weariness had thrown us both into a troubled unsatisfactory slumber, from which I awoke with a start at the sound of his footsteps. "It is time we should move," said he; "at two hours before day-light the drum will beat and the camp will move:—ye must not delay a moment in leaving it and gaining the Cudum Allee Shah. But we may find some difficulty in passing the sentinels; and if we should be challenged, we must have some story to tell.—What is it to be?"—"Be at rest upon that head," replied I: "I know the pass-word;—we are ready.—Bismillah!"

The horse was now got ready, and the mehtur placed his pack-saddle upon the ass. Noor Mahomed was lifted into his seat with pain and difficulty, while the mehtur taking hold of the

halter led it carefully along. The fires of the camp were waxing dull, and the stillness which reigned throughout the city of canvass was only interrupted by the roar of revelry from some party which preferred the pleasures of wine and mirth to those of sleep, even on the eve of a fatiguing march ; or the hum of the meerzas and secretaries in the outer tent of some principal officer, forced to perform the weary duties of their station at the sacrifice of some hours of needful repose. We stole along unnoticed or unheeded through the least frequented avenues of the encampment, which stretched for miles in every direction, bending our steps towards the town of Rawil Pundee, which showed its terrace-roofed houses just beyond the precincts of the camp.

We had nearly attained the entrance of the town through which our road lay, and were surrounded by a number of large tents, the ropes of which barred up every interval between their walls, when the sounds of voices and of horses' feet, accompanied by the glare of a lantern or two, approaching from the very quarter whither we were tending, arrested our progress in some alarm ; and before we could either retreat or determine on what was to be done, several mounted persons, whose dress declared them to be officers, followed by six or seven soldiers, came rapidly upon us. "Holla ! —who have we here ?" exclaimed a voice which I

instantly recognised:—"some of those robbers no doubt who have been easing our camp of its horses and cattle of late: some knavish Sings,* I'll be sworn.—Forward, dehbashee;—seize the villains, and let us see who they are;" and immediately four or five of the horsemen dashed forward, and grasping my horse's bridle, endeavoured to shove me off; while others seized upon Noor Mahomed and the ass. As for the mehtur, he dived under the tent-ropes in a moment, and made his escape.

I saw that there remained but one course to take; so shaking off the grasp of the horsemen with a jerk, which nearly did for them the favour they intended for me, I pushed forwards to their chief, who, apprehensive of an attack, from the suddenness of the act, plucked out his sword with all haste. "The worthy Lootf Allee Khan need apprehend nothing," said I, bending towards him, and in a voice intended only for his own ear:—"a poor outcast of fortune desires only a single word with his lordship."—"Yah Khodah Buzoorg! Ismael Khan?"—"The same," replied I, "changed in outward fashion, as you see. The sun of royal favour has withdrawn its fostering beams, and the flower of my fortune has withered. I obey the royal mandate in leaving the camp; and the poor, half-murdered wretch along with me is of mine:

* Or Sikhs, a people inhabiting the Punjaub, then in their infancy, now a powerful nation.

—we have nothing but our lives and this sorry beast. In the name of God! take no notice; withdraw your men, and let us pass!”—“I understand,” replied the khan.—“I am blind: I can do no more. May God protect you, and restore you to favour!—Hoh! there, men; all is right.—Let the fellows go; and one of you see them clear out of camp:—pass the out-post and sentry there, and then return to me.” We passed on with a fervent prayer of thankfulness for this most fortunate escape; for another experience of the loving-kindness of the furoshes to us would have been worse than instant death; nor would the tender mercies of the troopers have been at all more desirable.

Just as we passed the last sentinel, and the horseman had left us to ourselves, we were relieved from much anticipated perplexity by the presence of our good friend the mehtur, who issuing from among some broken ground on the left, joined us at this moment. “In the name of God and his Prophet!” exclaimed he in a voice which still trembled, “how did you escape the clutches of Lootf Allee Khan?—for him it surely was. Well did I know his black beard and keen eye; and still better that gallant chestnut horse of his: there was nothing for it but to bolt:—but, thank God! you are safe; and my poor ass too.—Mash-Allah! I began to think my easy good-will was

going to cost me dear:—but, bismillah! in God's name, for the town: there is nothing more to fear; they are quiet people here, and would as soon touch a red-hot sword as any thing from the camp."

And so in fact it proved. A solitary light was burning here and there in the streets of Rawil Pundee, as we passed through them quite unmolested, and, turning to the south, by a narrow lane, issued once more into the country, among corn-fields, and trees and gardens, which extended the greater part of the way to the Cudum Allee Shah. Of this building we could only now observe that it was situated among a grove of trees, in broken ground, and was itself of no great extent, exhibiting a sort of octagonal mass, rising to a dome, part of which had fallen in. A number of ruined arches, and fragments of mason-work stood around it, which might have been the remains of a former court-yard, now entirely demolished.

Carefully picking his way among the ruins, our mehtur proceeded to a large archway, which appeared to have formed the principal entrance of the building, and began to call out upon the old occupant of the place. "Ai! Soobhaun Allee! where art thou?—appear!—be present!—here are friends. Hoh! yah ullah! Huk! huk!" but the old fakeer seemed very unwilling to quit his lair, and it was necessary to reiterate the above

adjuration several times before a little twinkling chiragh* was seen, throwing abroad its sickly ray in the dark air of midnight. “ Whose voice is that ?—who summons Soobhaun Allee from his midnight meditations ?” murmured the voice of the withered old man who bore it, in tones tremulous as much from fear as age. “ What untimely disturbance is this ?—Ye are accursed if it be without sufficient cause.”—“ Ay, cause enough, old uncle ; we are friends, man :—remember Ghuzzab Mehtur, who gave thee a silver rupee for a charm last year against the evil eye, when he was going to Shahjehanabad. Heaven knows whether it kept off evil eyes, but it seems to have frightened away fortune ; for sure enough little of good has cast its eye or its influence on poor Ghuzzab since we parted.”

“ Ah ! my son, is it thou ?—and dost thou want another charm ?—I have a powerful talisman.”—“ No, no, uncle, no more talismans for me ; but here is some game that may serve for thee as well. Here are two pilgrims, one sick, the other well, who wish to say their own prayers at the cudum, and to have the benefit of thine, please God : they will pay for their maintenance ; and perhaps you may contrive to sell them also a charm against the evil eye : they stand much in need of one at present, God knows.”

* A small lamp.

“ Ah ! my children, ye are welcome ;—my prayers ye shall surely have, and a talisman too if need be. Friend Ghuzzab, it seems as though ye doubted of the value of my charm ; but trust me, had it not been for that same precious article, which ye wheedled from me so much under its true value, ye would have now been a withered cripple begging about the streets of Shahjehanabad—or perhaps an ape :—what say you to that ?—a long-tailed ape, mowing and chattering on one of their pagan temples ; a fine condition for a good Mus-sulman, truly. La-illah-il-ullah ! may God avert all evil !—but come, my children, enter : I will show you where ye may repose till morning.—Ah ! a horse, I see :—well, show the lower vault, my son : the beast may rest there until day : it will not quarrel with the old tanyan,* which carries my older bones, will it ? ”

The horse was duly installed in his dark quarters, the entrance of which was closed by an old mat, while we were led up a few steps into an apartment, dirty enough, and blackened with the smoke of many years, where the fakeer had fixed his abode. In one corner lay spread his mat, with an old cotton resai, or quilt, which served him for a bed ; and the only other furniture was a brass pot or two for drinking and purposes of ablution :

* A sorry kind of pony.

an earthen vessel for charcoal, a spear-headed staff of considerable length, and some bundles of rags, as they seemed, hanging upon nails in the wall. A fire of charcoal smouldered in a chulah, or cooking place of bricks near the wall, and a nargeel, or water-pipe, made of a cocoa nut, with a clay-headed tobacco-holder, stood close by, as if it had just been smoked out. From two corners of this apartment branched off smaller chambers, into one of which he showed my brother and myself, and throwing down an old half-rotten mat, he besought us to excuse the poverty of an old fakeer ; adding, that on the morrow he would endeavour to make some addition to our comfort.

We now took leave of our kind-hearted horse-keeper, on whom I forced a piece of gold, in spite of his resistance, assuring him that I was better provided than he gave me credit for. I then besought the old man to permit me to prepare a fomentation for my sick friend, who had hurt his foot (I told him) by a fall from his horse, intending thus to account for his inability to move about ; but my plan was almost defeated by the importunity of our host, who insisted upon operating himself, and even upon applying a charm which he assured me was sovereign for a sprained ancle ; nor was it without great difficulty that I evaded his offer of service.

At last we were left to ourselves, and to such

repose as we might be able to procure ; and I had just began to sink into a troubled slumber, when the sound of drums and trumpets, and the occasional discharge of a musket, aroused me with a start, and I heard the full rush of a distant multitude. Forgetting for a moment my change of condition and present circumstances, I sprung from my hard couch, and called upon the names of my customary attendants : my voice roused the old fakeer, who supposing me to be alarmed, exerted his tremulous voice to appease me. “ Fear nothing, my son,” said he, “ it is only the camp of that scourge of the earth—that dog of a Persian shah, which, by the blessing of God, is quitting the place to leave us in peace—may he be roasted in hell ! the infidel accursed !—may every drop of Mussulman blood he has shed upon earth turn to a sea of molten lead, to refresh him when he thirsts !”

Thus did the old man growl out his curses ; and I felt my cheek flush as he proceeded, and my brow contract into a frown preparatory to an explosion of indignant wrath ; but a thrill of most painful remembrance shot through my brain, and stopped the ill-timed ebullition as the truth became present to my mind. “ They are then gone !—really gone !” exclaimed I mentally, “ and I am left here deserted, abandoned in a foreign and a hostile land ! This is the reward of so many years’ faith-

ful service!—so much zeal and attachment to his person!—so much blood spilt in his cause! and all my former favour, my rank and command; my property and followers; nay, my very name and place on earth are gone! stript from me by the very man for whom I have done and suffered so much! And all for a hasty word, uttered not for myself, but for a friend. But no, it was not that hasty word; it was no act of mine that produced this fearful change. It is that accursed thirst for riches—that greed of precious things, which hath besotted him, as wine doth the drunkard. He is maddened with prosperity and success; his reason is perverted. He is no longer the same Nadir whom I loved and served, and would have died for; but a grasping, jealous, bloody tyrant, who loves only himself, and would permit none other to prosper.—I renounce him!”

“But what after all am I to do?” was the question which still recurred, after each burst of furious indignation had left me more calmly to contemplate our forlorn condition. “My occupation—the business of my life is gone!—There is no other warrior, no chief, no captain in all Iraun to whom I can attach myself, or who could afford protection to an outcast like myself: and I would not—no, I could not, lift my sword against the leader I have followed—the patron whom I loved; the approving glance of whose eye has so often

made my heart bound with delight." It was a wild and strange feeling that came over me ;—the change, the fearful vacancy which had occurred, was now becoming palpable : as he who has lost his only and well-beloved friend, feels at each step, in every act and attitude of life, the aching void which weighs upon his soul ; so did this overwhelming calamity present itself to the mind at every turn, and brood like a spirit of evil over every suggestion for the future.

One thing however was certain: I had no business here ; my wife, my sister, the only remaining ties I had in life, were in my native land. I had left them in Mushed ; and on my prompt appearance to relieve and take them thence might depend their lives, their honour ; for what might not the slaves or minions of a tyrannical despot attempt—nay, perpetrate against the family of a degraded, ruined man ? So far then my duty ; my course of acting was plain ; and to this point did I always return :—to fly homewards—to secure my family against insult and danger, or to die in their behalf, if such should be my fate ; and if I should succeed in rescuing them, fortune might then do its worst.

To perish of want, if I should once reach my native land, was scarcely to be feared. My strength and skill could hardly fail of procuring

me service, even with subordinate chiefs : and it shot across my imagination like a gleam of sunshine on a wintry track—" May not the day yet come when he shall find that the disgraced, degraded Ismael can do good service?—when he may repent of his cruel, groundless severity,—of his hasty injustice?"—" But," whispered Reason, " he has been *more* than cruel and unjust ; he has been ungrateful : he has unworthily broken faith, and deceived your well-founded hopes. Trust not to such a master any more."—" Oh ! but he may repent," returned Hope, " experience will make him wiser ; he will learn the value of zeal and affection, and cherish those who possess them ; he will lavish on you tenfold kindness." But, alas ! the wound was yet too green ; reason could not be satisfied :—besides, as Noor Mahomed had said, " where was Mushed, and where Rawil Pundee?"—How were we to get there ? The disturbed state of the country was entirely adverse to travelling, and we had not even the advantages of ordinary travellers ;—we were proscribed persons, and dared not show ourselves in open day : our progress must of necessity be secret and in disguise, and consequently perilous, uncertain, and slow : yet our affairs demanded the utmost speed. The more I reflected on our difficulties, the greater they seemed to become ; and revolving on these things,

I remained awake, until the beams of morning entering my cell, aroused me from a sleepless lair.

The voice of the old fakeer, who, believing that religious motives alone had led us to the shrine, presumed that I would of course wish to avail myself of the earliest moment for commencing my devotions, summoned me to morning prayers ; and I lost no time in joining him at the tomb. The grave was covered with an old worm-eaten chest, said to be made of ebony, from India ; over which lay the remains of a keenkhab cover ; and it stood in the centre of the principal domed apartment, under a canopy of some rich material, once glittering and brilliant, but now buried in dust, and tarnished as well as tattered with age. After the due observance of such forms and rites as our host the fakeer thought fit to prescribe upon the occasion, I returned to attend Noor Mahomed, who, somewhat refreshed by his night's rest, but stiff and sore, awaited me with impatience to minister to his hurts.

I now took occasion to explain at greater length than could be done the night before, that we required the shelter of the durgah for some days, until my brother should be able to travel ; and I put into the fakeer's hands a few rupees, requesting him to procure us some victuals and necessities ; and the old man left the place for that

purpose, advising that if we wished to remain undisturbed, we should keep as close as possible to the chamber which he had assigned us. The advice was good ; but I could not so strictly follow it as not to look around the place, and even ascend by a broken staircase to the roof of the mausoleum, from which, looking westward, I could still discern the clouds of dust caused by the departing host of my countrymen ; and close to the town, and around the very durgah, numberless little hazy columns, raised by the straggling parties which yet lingered behind, afforded hints to enforce the counsel of the old man. So I returned to my cell, where I passed the greater part of the day in speculating with my brother-in-law upon our prospects, considering our future plans, and vainly seeking to penetrate that future, which was in mercy concealed from our view.

When the fakeer returned, we learned that both town and country still swarmed with the laggards of the Kuzzilbash army ;—“ And,” remarked he, “ these dogs of Sings will have rare work with them ; many a throat will be cut, and many a baggage horse carried off before they cross the Attock ;—may the devil help those who lose, as well as the winners ! for, what with Sikh and Kuzzilbash, Affghaun and Oozbeck, the fair Punjaub is a sorry sight to see.” In fact, great part of the losses which the army suffered every

day in baggage and cattle were inflicted by this fierce and turbulent sect, which, neither Hindoo nor Mahometan, are enemies to both, and oppressed by the emperors of Dehlee, wreak their vengeance in return upon all of his faith.

“ But what people or tribes have you in this immediate neighbourhood?” inquired I; “ for we are strangers, from the eastern parts of Hindostan, bound to Caubul, and were glad to pay for the protection we received thus far, from an officer in the army that has just passed by, but which we have been forced to leave, in consequence of my friend’s accident.”—“ Strangers indeed ye must be, my children,” replied the old fakeer, “ not to know that here you are on the very borders of the Eussufzehees, one of the most powerful of all the Affghaun tribes. The plains around us, and to the south, are indeed partially inhabited by Guckers, the remnant of a very warlike tribe, which once possessed great power in these parts; and in those lofty rugged mountains, which you may see rising blue and distant yonder, there is a race as wild and savage as their habitations; they are called Seaposhes, from their black woollen garments, and Kaffers, because they are unbelievers;—but the Affghauns, and of them the Eussufzehees on the north, and the Khuttuck tribes to the south, are those who now are the most powerful.”

“ And what may be the character of the Eussufzehees ? ” inquired I, anxious to be better informed upon a subject which might probably have much influence upon our future proceedings.—

“ Hum !—well—the Eussufzehees are not a bad people,” slowly articulated the fakeer, as if afraid of committing himself:—“ at least,” added he, “ there would be little discretion in saying otherwise, so nearly within reach of their spears.”—“ But are they kind, hospitable, honest ? or are they fierce, cruel, deceitful ? How do they behave themselves to strangers that go among them ? ”

“ Why, as to that—they are—between ourselves be it said—almost all that you have mentioned ; and that seems contradicting enough, you will say ; fierce and cruel enough they are to their enemies ;—nor are they very scrupulous about the means of getting these same enemies into their power ; but to their friends they are kind and faithful enough ; and as for hospitality, you know little indeed about the Affghauns if you make any doubt of their possessing it in the highest degree ; but then it must be claimed under a proper title, and in the regular form. With regard to honesty, no men have more of it, when they don’t happen to be tempted by the sight of a weak cafilah, or a traveller with a pair of well-

stuffed yekdauns,* a good horse, or fair arms, truly they like not to see in any other hands than their own. But true Mussulmans are the Eussuffzehees ; they revere holy men, and do not spare their alms on fakeers ; no one need die of hunger in their country provided he covers his head with a dervish's coollah."

" And what think you, father ? would a man then be safe in trusting himself among these Eussuffzehees ? and in what fashion had he best present himself ?—as a dervish ?"

" Truly, my son, that might depend upon many circumstances ;—but you are not dealing openly with me :—if you want my advice, speak out plainly ;—the physician prescribes not until he sees his patient and knows his ailment."—

" Well then, truly, father, I have been considering that for poor peaceable fellows like us to travel in the rear of an army, which leaves little more than poverty and ill-will and disorder in its track, would scarcely be better than to throw our lives away ; for as to property, small matter of that have we to lose. And it struck my poor brain that we should be safer by turning aside from the direct road to Caubul, and taking a circuitous path which might lead us clear of the Persian host and its perils."

* Travelling trunks.

“ My son,” replied the fakeer, “ there is much reason in what you have said ; for the kites and vultures that hang upon the skirts of yon multitude of robbers and murderers consider not curiously what prey they stoop upon ;—but for the Eussuffzehees :”—he stopped abruptly. “ Well, what of them father ?”—“ Truly, my son, if you are cautious and prudent ;—but what young head is so ?”—“ Oh, father, fear me not :—I am no such young nestling :—I have seen the world.”—“ Well, then, I say, that with prudence and discretion, a man might get on among these same Eussuffzehees well enough. But they are a wild, proud, fierce caste ; the taunt is ever on their tongue, the fire in their eye, and the long knife in their hand. Even among themselves village is against village, clan against clan, and chief against chief ; nay, the inhabitants of the same village thirst for one another’s blood, and nourish feuds which blood alone can quench. With one mullich or one chief you may be safe ; but how is a man to steer between the various jarring interests that spring up around him to perplex his path ?”

“ But is there no great chief, father, by the bridle of whose steed we could seek a refuge,—under the shadow of whose arm we might rest or journey in peace ?”—“ Hum !—such there are, no doubt ; but how are you to reach their dwellings,

far removed as they are within the jaws of dangerous passes, and deep among the mountains? Khoosheal Khan, for instance, lives at Judara in the valley of Boonere; his khyle* is powerful, and he knows how to maintain authority over it; in truth they say he stops at no means of strengthening his sway. Were you once with him, and were it his good pleasure so to do, he might pass you on to Dilawur Khan of Swaut, who could easily procure you a safe conduct through the country of the Otman-Khyle, from whence the road to Jelallabad offers but trifling difficulties; and there you might remain at leisure and in safety to resolve upon your further progress."

"And how far from hence do you reckon the dwelling of Khoosheal Khan?—what country should we have to go through?—and what sort of people are its inhabitants?"—"Well, let me see: what should I say? A stout man might reach the place with ease in five or six days, or even less, provided he took the most direct road; but you would have to go through the hills in order to avoid the light-fingered followers of the camp, and that will lengthen the journey. As to the people on the way, truly there is little good to be said for them, especially in times like these, when the only law is that of the strongest. The Guckers

* Tribe.

are stout resolute fellows, who will have their toll from wealthy travellers that take the road ill attended ; and unless you could gain the good-will of some Eussuffzehee, your throat might be cut long before you could reach Joodara. But the Sikhs are the worst rogues to deal with, for they care neither for Affghaun nor Mogul ; and woe betides all who fall into their hands.”

“ Well, father, you give no very tempting account of the northern districts : what say you to the country south of the direct road ?—what dangers and what facilities does it present to a peaceable traveller ?”—“ In truth, then, my son, if you desire the truth, I do not believe your safety would be at all increased by attempting any line to the south of the usual caravan route. I confess to you that I know less of the tracks which lie in that direction ; but this I do know, that the Khutucks and the Khyberee tribes are the most notorious robbers in all Affghanistan ; and you would have to fight or to pay for every step of the way, with a tolerable certainty of being at last betrayed for the sake of the clothes you wore or the horse that carries you. Besides, the country is as wild and intricate, if not so high, as the Hindoo-Coosh themselves. Allah alone knows the perplexities of these regions ; and he only could say when you might reach Caubul, even if you could contrive to keep your head upon its shoulders so long. No,

no ! bad as the Eussuffzehees are, they are better than the Khyberree savages ; and perhaps, after all, some good chance may cast up to give you safe convoy into their country: without it you scarce can move ; for truly this neighbourhood is in a terrible state of lawless confusion. But God is great !—Your friend will not be able to move for many days ; and we shall see what happens in the mean time.”

This conversation afforded me matter enough for reflection, and that not of the pleasantest description. Our further progress seemed only to present a choice of difficulties and impediments, which could scarcely fail of occasioning much delay ; and to us delay might be ruin. No caravan would attempt to travel from Lahore to Caubul, or in any part of that route, for many months after the army should have passed: as soon might the hare take its course through a herd of hungry jackalls. Single travellers might indeed make the attempt ; but the risk would be so great, that no one who had much depending upon his personal safety, as was our own case, would dream of periling it upon so poor a chance of escape.

My hope—my object was, rather to precede than follow the army, and this could only be effected by making some long and rapid marches in advance, and so cutting into the track it would probably take, when the speed and lightness of an

individual or small party would doubtless surpass the movements of a military march ; and in that case we might hope to reach Mushed before the news of our misfortunes. From my own knowledge of the country between Herât and Attock I thought that this measure might best be attempted by keeping altogether to the north of the Caubul river, and along the skirts of the Cohistan to Ghorebund and Boot Baumian ; and from thence traversing the thinly inhabited country of the Hazarehs and Feerozecoees, with whom I was better acquainted, and from whom I had less dangers to apprehend than from the Affghauns, we might come down at once upon Herât, avoiding the long circuit by Ghiznee and Kandahar.

Now certainly this scheme of proceeding was more likely to be promoted by adopting the northern route proposed by the fakeer, leading through the country of the Eussuffzehees, than by any other ; and this one therefore, in spite of the difficulties and dangers it presented, I became resolved to attempt, provided no better plan should occur to us in the interim.

For several days after the conversation I have related we continued quietly residing in the durgah Cudum Allee Shah. Noor Mahomed gradually recovered the effects of his bruises ; and after the stragglers of our camp had quitted the neighbourhood of Rawil Pundee, I ventured into the

bazar of that town to equip both myself and my brother more fully than it had been possible to do on the evening when we quitted the camp ; and thinking the Affghaun dress best suited to the Affghaun country, I completed the apparel of both according to that fashion.

CHAPTER III.

THE CARAVAN.

“MUJDEH!” exclaimed the fakeer one day, on returning from one of his excursions,—“a present for my news! learn that there are several very respectable persons intending to proceed to Boonere and Punjecorah, who propose uniting themselves into a small caravan for mutual protection. On hearing of this I mentioned that I had some friends, brave fellows, who talked of turning their steps in that direction, and who, I doubted not, would readily join the party: they were delighted at such a promised addition, and will accordingly receive you with more than the salutation of peace.”—“And when do these worthy people talk of setting off? I am quite aware of the value of such an escort; I only fear my friend’s health may not be recovered enough for the exertion.”—“Why, they did talk of starting two days hence, but they expect certain dealers from Guzzerat and

Sinde, who will pay well for protection ; this they mean to afford them at their own rate, and a delay of some days must consequently take place." This was just what I wanted ; for in truth my brother was already so far recovered that I doubted not with the help of our horse he would get on comfortably enough.

It appeared that these travellers consisted of about a dozen Taujuck merchants of the place and from Peshawur, who were carrying up sugar, spices, coarse cottons, and such similar merchandise for sale to the khans of the Eussuffzehees and Otman-Khyle, from whom they were to receive in return hill ponys, Kaffer slaves, fruits, nuts, &c. To these a few dervishes and fakeers had joined themselves ; and by the temptation of tolerably high wages they had induced three or four fierce-looking fellows, armed to the teeth, real lion-eaters by their own account, to accompany them, and assist in repelling the attacks of Sikhs and all other robbers on the way.

Being introduced to the principal merchants as a Patan from Hindostan desirous of proceeding to the abode of Khoosheal Khan in Boonere, and understanding that I had carried arms, I was received with great cordiality, and assured that arrangements should be made for mounting me to my satisfaction. As for the Hindoos from Guz-

zerat, from all accounts it appeared that their numbers were more likely to detract from than to add to our real strength, inasmuch as their additional wealth would increase the temptation to attack, and probably be the cause of its being made with additional numbers. Nevertheless, to wait was resolved upon, and there was nothing for it but to submit.

In three days these merchants made their appearance, and it was resolved that we should break ground. Noor Mahomed by this time had quite recovered of his bruises, although the wounds were still somewhat tender. To him therefore I resigned my yaboo, and was accommodated with a stout Toorkee pony at the expense of the principal pacific travellers.

Accustomed as I had been from my earliest outset in life to the promptness and regularity of military movements, and especially to the strict discipline and rapid manœuvres of a master like Nadir, it was impossible not to be disgusted with this my first experience of the movements of a caravan; for such was the imposing appellation assumed by our party, small though it was. And, to say the truth, in point of slowness, irresolution and cowardice, we might have competed with the largest caflah that ever travelled through Affghanistan.

In number we amounted to five-and-thirty per-

sons ; of whom the original Taujucks and Hindkees, with their servants numbered nearly fifteen. The Hindoos and their attendants, with Noor Mahomed and myself, and six or seven camel drivers, dervishes, &c. formed the residue ; and I must say that a more motley, ill-assorted group of travellers never before met my eyes. Each man was mounted ; the Taujuck and Hindkee merchants in their peaceful-looking garb, comfortable gowns, good sheep-skin or cotton quilted cloaks, and ample turbans, bestrode their sober beasts (which were accoutred after a substantial and cumbrous fashion) in a manner suited to the gravity of their character. Few of them made even a show of carrying arms, and on those who did, the heavy matchlock and curved scimitar hung rather as troublesome incumbrances than useful and appropriate weapons. Their servants indeed presented a more formidable appearance ; hung round with swords and guns and powder-horns, as well as with the long Affghaun knife, all of which they wore with a familiar air, they at least looked well the parts of their masters' defenders. Some of them, Persians by birth, were readily distinguishable by the more rakish air with which they girt their loongees (or shawl girdles) round their slender waists, and by the affected set of their Affghaun bonnet on one side, as I have seen our Kuzzilbashs wear their caps.

The Hindoos of the party, on the other hand, ad-

hered to their own wide-skirted jamehs * of muslin or cotton cloth, and large crimson or yellow turbans of formal shape, defending themselves against the increasing cold by wrapping up their persons in rich shawls of Cashmere. They also left to their attendants the task of protection; and these wore the peculiar round-hilted tulwar of Hindostan, with long small-bored matchlocks made at Lahore, and excellent of their kinds. Some too carried at their backs shields made of buffalo or rhinoceros hide.

But the valiant sworn defenders of our party were those among it who attracted most attention, and they were three in number. The first, a dark ruddy-faced thick-set man with a black curling beard and whiskers, that concealed nearly all his countenance except the eyes, wore a long-skirted sword-proof jacket of thick-quilted cotton, which increased his apparent bulk to an extravagant degree. His head was defended by a purple turban, formed of some dozens of yards of narrow cotton stuff, twisted like a rope with small steel chains, so as to render it also proof against a sword-cut; and over this gallant head-dress was negligently thrown one end of the scarlet loongee which hung across his back. A handsome ivory-ornamented matchlock was slung across his shoulders; a silver-mounted scimitar depended

* A peculiar sort of robe or gown.

from his side ; and a large Affghaun knife was stuck into his girdle, which had also to sustain a Turkish pistol as big as a small carbine, and a peishkubs or strong sharp-pointed dagger. An innumerable number of cartridge-boxes, bullet-cases, tinder-boxes, and other warlike appurtenances, completed the personal equipment of this hero, who was mounted upon a horse the minuteness of whose size seemed to mock the fierce dignity of its master's robustness. Nevertheless the spirited little animal moved at once with firmness and activity under its disproportioned burden, bearing, in addition to its rider with his heavy saddle and holsters, (filled, no doubt, with the appropriate instruments of death,) a pair of small but well-stuffed joals in front, and a tolerably sized bundle, wrapped up in black felt, strapped to the crupper. I ventured to inquire of this gallant figure his name and country, and received in reply a good-humoured but somewhat portentous roar, in good harmony with his appearance, purporting that he was Sheer-dil Khoon-khor Beg, a Ghiljee from Ghuznee, well known, as he was pleased to intimate, for his feats of prowess in all quarters, but particularly against those sorry dogs the Kuzzilbashes, hundreds of whose heretical necks had attested the biting sharpness of his scimitar (slapping its scabbard as he spoke), and that it had even drawn blood from the unblessed

body of that sinner their ruler, Nadir, whom might the fire of Heaven destroy! In short, had all only done as he did—but no, the time was past—the Affghauns had lost their ancient name, and become a nation of cowards, &c. &c.

The second of our defenders formed a striking contrast to the blood-drinking hero just described. He was tall, broad-chested, and well made; his complexion, once fair, had become embrowned by exposure. A nose, which for length and size I have seldom seen equalled, seemed to grow out of a long bushy beard of a bright-red colour, and was joined at its insertion in the forehead by two thick red eye-brows, which slanted violently upwards in opposite directions, as if they were habitually elevated in astonishment or alarm: these, in their turn, added ludicrously to the length of an enormously long visage, and left the large grey eyes beneath them absurdly prominent.

This tall champion was armed in a manner befitting his personal appearance. A jacket of steel mail covered his body; and his striped turban was twisted round a steel cap with a spike at the top: a red shawl fell picturesquely over his shoulders; and a blue loongee, passed round his waist, served to suspend a long dagger. A shield hung down behind his left arm; a capital match-lock was slung across his back; and in his right hand he carried a long steel-pointed lance. His

steed, a powerful northern horse, which bore the stamp of its Toorkoman origin, was more in unison with the appearance than adapted to the skill of its rider, who did not seem at all delighted by the occasional curvetings with which it expressed its impatience. The demeanour of this lofty personage, Ikhrām Khan—such and no less was the designation he rejoiced in—corresponded with the pretensions of his appearance. It was haughty and overbearing; scarce did he vouchsafe a reply to the salutations or questions of the party: he sat silent and unbending, awaiting the movement of the caravan which he had deigned to honour with his protecting presence.

The third and last of our guards was a well-made middle-sized man, mounted upon a stout active horse of the Punjabee breed. A swarthy but expressive countenance, and a piercing dark eye, distinguished him particularly from his companions, and lent a character of intelligence to his features, which impressed me strongly in his favour; and I felt at the first glance that he was the man of all the company on whom I should be inclined to rely in case of need.

On the day preceding that which was appointed for our departure the principal parties met in a caravanserai of the town to arrange the plan of the journey. One of the merchants, an old traveller, was chosen *cafilah-bashee*, or chief of the

caravan; and all persons interested were ordered to be in readiness with beasts loaded, and persons equipped at two hours before sunset on the following day. But it was easy to perceive that several of the company were filled with no small alarm at the thoughts of their journey; and the various reports which were industriously circulated betrayed this terror. The Sikh horsemen, it was asserted, had been more than commonly audacious since the retreat of the Persian army. They had even plundered several villages, which had not yet recovered from the panic inspired by the Kuzzilbashes, and were incapable of defending themselves. They had, moreover, taken possession of some of the hill passes, and were swarming towards Hussun-Abdal, in the rear of the Persians. The Guckers too, who inhabited certain districts of the hills to the north, had become more insolent and greedy. Three Hindkee merchants from Peshawur, with seven camels, were said to have been detained, and forced to purchase their liberty with the loss of more than half their goods; nay, rumours of serious disturbances among the Eussuffzehees themselves were whispered about; and the alarm of one of the merchants was so great, that he declared his intention of abandoning the journey and adventure altogether. He was persuaded out of this, however, at last; and the party separated, under an engagement to meet

again, as at first settled, upon the following evening.

The evening came ; the appointed hour arrived, and with it came the travellers, all duly prepared and arrayed. The men were mounted ; the camels of the Guzzerat merchants were already loaded ; and the loads of all the rest stood ready prepared ; and you might have heard the sarwans and mule-teers swearing and quarrelling with the other servants, according to their custom upon a journey ; yet with all this note of preparation, there was something in the arrangements and aspect of the party—a certain tardiness, an indecision—which at once declared to the experienced eye that there was no serious intention of moving for that night.

But I was not then experienced in the ways of a cafilah ; and annoyed at what seemed a most unnecessary delay, I could not help inquiring into the reason of losing so much time : if it was resolved upon to make a start, why should we linger so long and so uselessly here ? “ Patience,” solemnly responded one ; “ we shall start soon enough, no fear.”—“ Would you break ground without knowing whether we have a lucky hour or not ?” demanded another somewhat indignantly.—“ What in the name of the Prophet is all this about ?” said I to a third : “ have not the munajems* been

* Astrologers.

already consulted? have they not already fixed upon this day and hour?—what would we have more?”—“*Kia janoon!*—what should I know?” responded the Hindkee with a shrug.

The chief merchants having retired into a corner, were smoking their pipes in consultation, while I was impatiently endeavouring to forward the object of our meeting, and induce the party to break ground at least this night. “Make yourself easy, friend,” observed the individual whom I have described as the third of our trusty guard, and whose name I found was Daood, “there will be no start to-night; not one of these worthy muhagins* have the smallest idea of moving a foot—they can’t make up their minds in such a hurry. It will be much if they break ground three days hence.”—“To-khodah!” cried I impatiently, “what do you tell me? why then appoint a day and an hour?”—“I see you are a stranger to undertakings of this importance,” replied Daood, with something of a cool sneer: “every thing must have a beginning, you know: if they never appointed a day for starting, they never would meet to settle the business of the journey, and to pluck up courage.”—“Pluck up courage!—the devil!—but since the cowardly fools know that go they must, why not do it at once?”—“Pray, did you never ford a river in a cold winter day?”

* Merchants, traders.

—“ Yes, certainly.”—“ And did you never linger a moment upon the bank, half unwilling to commit yourself to the freezing water ? Well, these honest merchants are afraid of the water ; they dread the danger though they love the profit, and they hesitate to encounter it. Besides, there may be other reasons for delay : one of these worthies has not been able to make up his bale of spices or indigo in time, so he circulates a report of an hundred Sikh horsemen being seen near Noorpore, and that sickens the rest for a day. The servant of another falls ill, or his wife has had a bad dream ; and thereupon comes an express with news that the Guckers have seized upon the passes, and have eaten up so many poor Hindkees alive, because they could not ransom themselves. Then another knows of some expected arrival by which he hopes to increase his speculation profitably, and a good well-sounding lie is got up to create time for this arrival. And thus it often goes on for weeks instead of days, when a greater number of jarring interests are set in motion by the assemblage of a larger caravan.”

“ But what do you and your companions say to such delay ? Is time of no value to you ?”—“ Faith, not of much ; and we always make our bargain accordingly. They must feed us from the day we engage with them ; and good food and quarters are always something. When the job is over we

must shift for ourselves.—But how do you come to be a stranger to all these matters? did you never travel in a caravan before?”—“ In truth no, friend ; I have been more of a soldier than a merchant ; I have travelled more with camps than with cafilahs ; and hence my ignorance.”—“ Ah ! a soldier ;—may you be prosperous ! But that is a poor garb for a soldier.”—“ It is a safe one, at least, for the occasion ; business leads me to Boonere, where my own coat might bring me into jeopardy:—I may cast my slough, however, some day.”—“ You are for Boonere ? and whither, pray, in Boonere ?”—“ I am for Joodara, to the presence of Khoosheal Khan Eussuffzehee.”—“ Hah !—Khoosheal Khan ?—well, well !—no doubt your business is urgent ; success to you !”—“ What ! do you know the khan ?”—“ Know him !—well.”—“ In that case you can tell me something about him.”—“ Truly, friend, it appears to me that a man ought to be acquainted with his host before he visits him ; and doubtless you know Khoosheal Khan as well as I do : at all events, I see no reason why I should discuss his character with a perfect stranger.”—“ Ah ! pardon me—I meant nothing wrong ; only I am in truth a stranger in these parts, and I thought you might have had the charity to give some hints to a brother soldier.”—“ Hark ye, friend !—but what in the devil’s name is going on next among

these worthy sages?—let us know what they are about.”

In fact, a murmur and a buzz just then arose among the council, which increased as we drew near.—“No, no! may God avert it!” exclaimed one.—“Certainly, there is no other way,” cried another.—“By the tomb of my father, ye are mad!” shouted a third.—“Barekillah! the suggestion is worthy of Lôkman!” roared a fourth.—“La-illah-il-ullah! what occasion is there to pull beards about it?” said a grave personage, with a long grizzled beard, and a huge green turban, which indicated him as one of the descendants of the Prophet;—“the way to correct your judgment is open; try a *faal*,* here is a koraun.”—“Nay, there needs neither koraun nor Hafiz for that matter,” observed another of the party;—“I have counted my tusbee already; I called odds, and my hand was on the thirtieth bead.”—“Yes, yes!—that’s very well,” interrupted another; “but the koraun is still better.”—“Ay, the koraun! the koraun!” cried several other voices tumultuously: so the holy book was produced; and the whole party once more sitting down, silence prevailed for an anxious interval, during which the seyed uttered several prefatory prayers, calculated to insure a proper efficacy to the appeal about to be made to

* A presage: a practice in the East resembling the “Sortes Virgilianæ.”

the sacred volume. At length it was opened with solemn ceremony, and the passage indicated was read aloud by the seyed: it was as follows:—
“Therefore art thou inexcusable, O child of clay, that darkenest thy judgment with folly, and settest at defiance the Most High, by rejecting the admonition of his Prophet:—verily, thy punishment is sure.”

“Alhumdul-illah! praise be to God! never was a plainer reply—never a clearer injunction!” ejaculated the seyed.—“Ameen!—clear as the noon-day sun!” burst forth a second;—“and therefore let us load and be off.”—“Off?” cried the seyed in angry astonishment.—“Off?” shouted another, in the same tone.—“Off?” roared half the party.—“La-illah-il-ullah! the man is distracted:—does not the response plainly prohibit our moving a foot until the Prophet shall have admonished us of our safety?—what prophet has declared it to us yet?”—“In the name of Allah and his Prophet, oh, thou blind reader,” retorted the other;—“what more positive admonition wouldst thou desire?—wouldst thou have the blessed Mahomed, or the angel Gabriel come down and roar it in our ears? If we depart not upon this command, be sure that punishment will fall on us.”—“Then go thou alone,” vociferated the indignant seyed; “for, inchallah! there is no one here impious enough to accompany thee.”

But enough : the timid, or interested party, carried the day, and the journey was deferred until next evening at the same hour.

Why should I detail the irksome and preposterous delays which detained us yet four days more at this wearisome place ? The only consolation we had was that the health of my brother-in-law was improved by the lengthened rest, and his strength for the journey increased. At length, the courage of these bold merchants was screwed up to the proper pitch, or their several interests were reconciled to proceeding. We took leave of the Cudum Allee Shah, and of our friend the old fakeer, to whom from my trifling store I gave a parting présent. The party was assembled, and the beasts all loaded ; and at two hours before sunset on a chill October evening, we left Rawil Pundee, and proceeded straight across the plain towards the hills.

Our journey that night was short, and without occurrence of consequence. It was exhilarating to our depressed spirits once more to find ourselves in motion—in progress at least, towards the object of our earnest wishes, although in a style so widely and painfully different from that to which we had so long been accustomed. I rejoiced to feel that the journey which, if fortune were not altogether adverse, should restore us to our homes and families, was at length commenced ; nor was it a trifling gra-

tification to observe that Noor Mahomed was so perfectly recovered as to be able to perform his exercises as well as ever. "Good," thought I, "if but one or two of this numerous company will stick by us, it is not a small body of Sikhs that shall either stop or scatter us." I did not then think how soon our valour was to be put to the test.

Leaving Goureepoor, the village in which we had passed the heat of the day, we resumed our course in the evening; and having travelled till the hour of morning prayers, we dismounted in a little plain, or rather valley, chiefly surrounded with hills, and thinly sprinkled with trees, in order to say our prayers and to refresh ourselves. The spot was not considered as free from danger, and therefore some of us remained mounted while the rest performed their numaz,* or warmed themselves and partook of a water-pipe at the fire of dried weeds which had been kindled. Daood, the Ghiljee, and myself, together with half the armed attendants, remained therefore upon horseback, while the merchants all alighted. But scarcely had they smoked a pipe or said a prayer, when our ears were saluted by the sound of horses' hoofs, and looking around us, we saw a troop of twenty horsemen wearing high-peaked blueturbans, with short wide trousers and cloths round their

* Prayers.

middles of the same colour, and all armed with spears and swords, bows and arrows, or matchlocks, come riding full tilt upon us.

The alarm and bustle of our merchants may be conceived. All started up, and ran about in strange confusion, calling out for their horses, and for quarter in the same breath. But their attendants had something else to do than to look after their masters or their steeds, and many of them set off at once, as fast as their own beasts could carry them. The Ghiljee "lion-eater" seemed utterly confounded, and uncertain whether or no to follow their example; and our red-bearded champion, in bustling towards his horse, fell down, and probably overpowered by the weight of his own armour, could not immediately rise again.

Daood on the other hand, riding up to me, said, "Now is your time, old soldier: if your liver is stout, stand firm. These blue devils are arrant cowards, and a little steadiness will put them to the right-about. Let your companion join me, and do as I do."—"Agreed, by your head!" said I: "but let me profit by the fall of this redoubted champion, and arm myself a little better;" and galloping up to the horse of the red-bearded khan, which was picketed to the ground by his spear, I snatched the carbine which was hung at the saddle-bow.—"Now for it.—Bismillah!" said

I ; and accompanied by only three of the attendants, off we set to meet the marauders.

The Sikhs on their part, when they saw our small party advancing to meet them, drew gradually up, cautiously irresolute, and bending their bows, sent a flight of arrows at us. The most of these missiles whistled past us, and increased the confusion of those we had left behind, by falling in among them, while one or two slightly wounded some of ourselves. To stop this inconvenient practice, still pushing on, we discharged our matchlocks at the whole body with such fortunate aim, that one or two of the Sikhs fell from their horses ; upon which the party scattered on all sides, as if a shell had burst among them. “ Bismillah !—have at those to the right,” cried Daood ; and dashing at one nearest him, struck him a blow with such good-will, that his neck was almost divided, and he too came rolling to the ground.

Nor were Noor Mahomed and I upon our side idle. The play of the sword was familiar sport to us, and in a very few moments each had brought down his opponent, fortunately without receiving any injury ourselves. “ Hah ! Gholaumee !—Hah ! Naderee !” shouted I, in the excitement of the moment, while my brother returned the well-known response ; and the Sikhs starting at the sound, spurred away from us, and collecting in a little

knot, commenced a fire of matchlocks upon our little party.

A shout told me that this fire was not without its success, and looking round, I beheld my red-bearded friend, who had now mounted his steed, and rendered bold by our success, was pricking forward to join us, suddenly fall from his seat. "This won't do," said I; "we must charge these fellows again;" and, joined by a few others of the attendants, who seeing some probability of gaining credit for courage upon easy terms, had stopped their flight and come up, we did charge them. But it seems they had enough of it, for off they rode at speed, without waiting for us, and leaving five of their number dead or wounded on the ground.

Giving them a farewell volley, we rode back to our party, which had now got into some degree of order, and had the satisfaction to find that with the exception of a few slight arrow wounds to men and cattle, and the extinction of our red-bearded hero, we had come off scot-free. As for him, poor wretch, his caution had probably proved his destruction; for while believing the fray at an end and all danger past, he thought he might cheaply support his character for courage against an already beaten foe, a stray matchlock ball had struck him right in the heart, and penetrating

armour and all, left him dead upon the spot : had he charged with us he had probably escaped ; but it was his fate. As for the Ghiljee blood-drinker, we saw no more of him ; at the first fire he had put his little steed to its mettle and ridden off, arms, bags, and all, as doubtless was his practice in all frays ; and he thought it best not to show his face again.

The party now gathered around Noor Mahomed, Daood, and myself, loading us with blessings and commendations ; and adding, at the same time, their remarks upon the skirmish. “ Holy Prophet ! ” exclaimed one, “ how they did gallop up to these blue-turbaned knaves ! saw ye ever such boldness ? ” — “ And how the fellow did whirl about that sword ! ” cried one of the Hindoos, shuddering as he looked at its bloody blade ; “ shahwash ! shahwash ! * — one of our rajepoot thakoors could have done no better. ” — “ Ay, and how the unclean villains scampered away from them ! — blessed be their heads for it ! — Mashallah ! we have got some lion killers among us, and we now know which they are. — Oh, we shall get gallantly to Joodara now. — Thank Heaven we did start ! thank Heaven we have them with us ! — But see, here is the dead man’s horse ; what is to be done with it, and with his arms ? — Does any one know his family ? ” — “ Here is his match-

* Well done.

lock," said I; "it has done some good to-day,—more I fancy than on most occasions in its master's hands. And his horse is a more serviceable beast than my yaboo; with your leave, gentlemen, I will ride it instead."—"Ay, ay, it is but right; do so; and take his arms too," exclaimed the whole party, "you have well deserved them."

During this colloquy our friend Daood had not said a word, but stood eyeing us with interest and curiosity. When I was turning away to prepare for resuming our march, he followed me. "Salaam Aleicoum! comrade," said he with a very peculiar emphasis, "may your house flourish!—old soldier, indeed!—truly, I believe ye. Hah! Gholaum-e-Nadiree!—aha, aha! are we there?—Mash-Allah! I thought there was something in the trick of that sword and the handling of that matchlock that smacked neither of the Affghaun peasant nor the Hindostanee sepahce. Countryman, I greet you well, Salaam Aleicoum!" say I. "Aleicoum Salaam," replied I, in a corresponding tone of jocular irony; "yafteed, you have found me out; it is true that I am from the Hâk-e-Iraunee;*—but where would be the profit of telling that here?—you know on the contrary it might be very inconvenient to be recognised as such; and therefore if you are a countryman, as I have for some time suspected, you will oblige me

* Hâk, earth; the Persian soil.

by saying nothing on the subject to others.”—
“A countryman!” echoed he with kindling eyes;
“ay, you may swear it; every inch of me a
careless frank Iraunee, whose delight is in his
horse, his sword, the ‘cypress waist and antelope
eye;’ a cup of wine, and a song of the divine
Hafiz! Fear me not; I am true as steel;—your
secret is safe with me.—But how came you here?
—Ah! I can guess;—a scattering from the skirt
of that huge body that has just swept by;—a
grain dropt from its overgrown mass:—many such
are sprinkled over the country:—I marvel you
have not met with them.”

“My friend, your guess is just; I did belong
to it; but do so no longer. I am my own man,
and on my return homewards. But see, we must
join the party:—we may talk over this subject
hereafter:—we cannot be far from our munzil.”—
“No, not quite two cos.”*—“Well, then, we
shall resume the subject this evening; per-
haps you may *now* be more disposed to tell me
something about Khoosheal Khan.”—“Chusm!
rely upon me,” said he.

Accordingly, when we reached the village where
the day was to be passed, after having reposed
ourselves for a few hours, my new friend and
countryman, Daood, came to the corner in which

* A cos is about a mile and a half.

Noor Mahomed and I had fixed our quarters, and settling himself as comfortably as possible, he began at our request by informing us of his own history.

CHAPTER IV.

KHOOSHEAL KHAN.

“ I AM,” said he, “ a native of Tubbus in Khorasan. When Malek Mahmood Seistancee was in the height of his power I was a soldier in his household troops. During the period of his rule in Mushed I was attached to his person, and fought with him against your late master, until destiny frowned upon him, and he lost his power and his life together: you may comprehend then how familiar to my ears was the war-cry which escaped your lips this morning. Many of my comrades enlisted with the conqueror; but I preferred returning for a while to my own home, from whence I passed into various services, in which circumstances more than inclination led me, to be in opposition to the great conqueror. I have been a good deal in Ballouchistan and Sind, from whence I was led to take service with Hussun Ghiljee; and we had some tolerable experience of

your mode of fighting at Kandahar. There I was severely wounded, which again frustrated my intention of joining your army on its way to India ; and I have remained among the tribes of this country ever since, supplying my wants by such means as Providence pleases to send me. Nor can I say upon the whole that I have fared ill. The supply it is true has neither been very regular nor of such a description perhaps as a moollah would in all cases have approved of ; but we have contrived to exist.

“ As for your late master, however strong may have been my desire to enter his service, it has now passed away. I have ever had the most decided taste for preserving on my person all the members and features which God was pleased to give it ; and I am fond of enjoying in my own way the poor pay or plunder I may honestly acquire. Now, as it seems the shah’s opinion and mine might differ upon these points, I am resolved not to place myself in a situation where his might prove the ruling one. I have seen too many poor devils maimed or cast adrift to think of running the same risk. As for you, friends, I dare say you have reason to thank God for coming off with sound limbs ; but how happened your disgrace ? what rank had you ? what did you lose ? ”

I communicated to our new friend Daood such particulars of my story and condition as I

thought it safe to trust him with, concealing however my rank and name. I told him my reasons for taking so roundabout a course homewards as that by Boonere, and again requested him to gratify me by describing the khan's character, and by giving me such advice as might best enable us to present ourselves to him without danger of harm or detention.

“ To tell you the truth, friend Yussuff, (such was the name by which I chose to be known for the time,) I cannot flatter you that the course you have taken is likely to be either short or safe ; and yet, under all circumstances, perhaps it is the best within your choice. Following the army is out of the question ; and as for the southern routes, they are all worse than this. The old fakeer was right in that ; the Khyberees and Wuzeerees, and all the tribes of the Speenghur are nothing but fierce and bloody robbers ; nor are the khyles of Damaun much better : yes, if you must get on immediately, this is your best way :—head the army, and strike down upon Herât through Balah Moorghaub, and you will find your way home easily enough : but, Allah ! its a wild tract, and many a wild tribe will you have to pass through ; our honest Eeliauts are sheep and lambs to them !”

“ Oh !” replied I, “ of all that I am aware—I know the gentry well ; but this Khoosheal Khan—what say you of him ?—you know, that in such

cases, a fortunate start and a happy hour will often make a prosperous journey.”—“ Well ; with regard to Khoosheal Khan, you will have a nice and difficult game to play ; for his penetration and discernment are as great as his power.

“ Khoosheal Khan is the second son of a chief of the Laweezehee tribe—a branch of the Eussuffzehees, who possessed a few villages and a stronghold on the banks of the Boorrundoo river in Boonere. The father, Anwar Khan, was a man respected by his clan ; but, for a Eussuffzehee, peaceable, and not likely to increase his property either by force of hand or power of head : but in spite of this pacific temper, as it is impossible to live among the Eussuffzehees without quarrelling, or being quarrelled with, he died with more than one feud on his hands, which, along with his authority and other property he bequeathed to his eldest son. The younger, Khoosheal, did not dispute his succession to either ; on the contrary, he feigned the strongest attachment to his brother, appeared most zealous in his cause, and attended him, well armed, to defend him upon all occasions. Nevertheless, there were not wanting rumours that it was no other than Khoosheal who gave access to the shedders of blood scarce a year afterwards, when they entered the apartment in which the young khan lay asleep, guarded,

as he trusted and believed, by this very brother and his friends.

“ The suspicion of this treacherous intrigue received no small confirmation in the sequel, from the facility with which the new khan suffered himself to be reconciled to the family of the murderers ; for an overture being made upon the part of Durogh Khan, the prompter of the murder, to give a beautiful girl, an orphan niece of his own, as the price of blood, to staunch the feud, Khoo-sheal Khan not only accepted of the offer, but retained the girl as an especial favourite in his harem ever after.

“ Having thus become possessed of his brother's power, the khan sought by all possible means to accumulate riches, and to attach to his person followers independent of the tribe of which he was now the head. Well did he know that to strangers only could he trust for the means of promoting his ambitious projects, which would be vehemently opposed by every family of the clan, and nipped probably in the bud if unsupported by foreign aid. Accordingly, he purchased and trained to arms many Kaffer or Seaposh slaves ; retained in his service, and conciliated by high pay, a number of wild Ballouches, Sindees, and Hazarehs ; all of whom he made no scruple at sending out, under officers of approved fidelity,

to waylay travellers and small caravans. In the mean time he employed all the powers of a very acute judgment, and an address which he well knows how to render prepossessing, to sow dissensions among the chief persons of his ooloos,* attaching them one after another to himself, until his party became so powerful as to fear neither internal combination nor conspiracy against him.

By such keen-sighted and evil policy, and by watching and profiting by the difficulties of his neighbours, often fostered by his own devices, has Khoosheal Khan amassed great possessions, acquired very considerable power, and exercises an influence in the tribe of Eussuffzehee which only yields to that of Timoor Khan of Punjehorah ; and so ably does he veil his ambitious views from the principal men of his ooloos, under a show of zeal for the general benefit of the clan, that they continue devoted to him in spite of the many acts of arbitrary tyranny of which he is often guilty. He is in short an able, active, and ambitious chief, whose natural cruelty and rapacity are veiled by craft and dissimulation, or checked by prudential motives alone ; who is moderate or just from considerations of policy, and not from any inherent love of virtue.

“ It was as a captive that I became acquainted

* Or division of a tribe.

with Khoosheal Khan. Taken prisoner in a skirmish in Ballouchistan, I was purchased by an emissary of the khan, who was then adding as fast as he could to his military force, and I was ushered into his presence along with half a dozen others in much the same situation. After having questioned us regarding our respective countries and former occupations, and admonished us to be attentive and obedient to the directions we might receive from his nazir, whose business it was to appoint us our several duties, he was dismissing us, when I requested leave to say a few words to him in private, under whatever precautions he might think fit to order for the security of his person. The khan cast a look of surprise at me; smiled something scornfully at the suggestion of possible danger from me—for he is truly brave, and desired me forthwith to approach the window at which he was seated, and speak what I had to say.

“ ‘ Khan!’ said I, after a fitting salute, ‘ I am your prisoner—your slave; for you have purchased me: my life is in your hands—but only my life. My will is still my own; and I tell you plainly, that it will rest with yourself to render me a useful servant for a fixed and limited term, or to lose your money and your pains in the attempt to make me work against my inclination. I know the country well; and nothing short of

chains or death will keep me in it longer than I like. If you will promise to restore me to liberty after two years from this time, I will for these two years be a faithful and zealous servant; and you may find it more for your advantage to accept such willing work, than by seeking for more, to lose slave, money, and service altogether.'

"The khan smiled again, and beckoned me to leave the presence; but, as I afterwards learned, he charged his nazir to watch me well, and report of me especially. What report the nazir made of me I know not, nor need I weary you with detailing the struggles which took place upon the khan's part to reduce me to unconditional obedience; upon mine to evade all work, and to procure my freedom. Both, however, failed; and one day the khan, provoked at my obstinacy, but recollecting the conversation I had held with him on my first arrival, sent for me, and told me that he had a mind to make me useful to him on my own terms. 'I have certain enemies,' said he, 'and I require a stout friend who will undertake to remove them. Will you be that friend?'—'Chushm!' responded I, 'let your highness be pleased to indicate them.' And sure enough he did discover to me a tissue of plots and dangerous intrigues which might have daunted many a stout heart. But mine is not easily daunted, nor is my conscience particularly tender; besides, I was

extremely eager to regain my freedom. I undertook the various enterprizes, with full latitude as to time and means, but under a system of supervision, which the khan was satisfied I could not evade.

“ I cannot now enter into a detail of the means which I made use of to circumvent and delude the thick-skulled Affghauns : it is sufficient to say that the conditions of my liberation were performed, and the enemies of Khoosheal Khan slept with their fathers. But it was a still more difficult matter to force the khan to perform his part of the bargain : he saw and felt my value, and would fain have retained me in his service ; but I soon made him sensible that it was the shell, not the kernel of the nut, which he alone could grasp ; and I believe that it was only his full sense of the impossibility of extracting any good from me against my will, added to a wholesome recollection that an active and ingenuous friend might make a very dangerous enemy, and that the stratagems and contrivances which he admired when directed against his foes, might prove as efficacious against himself, that at length induced him to give me my discharge. I quitted him in spite of his high promises and repeated entreaties, well pleased to seek a less perilous and more satisfactory, even if a less lucrative service, although the latter could scarce be ; for now that he feels firm on his seat,

the khan is not the man who loves to see his followers become wealthy: he keeps them largely in arrears upon principle; and moreover, surrounds them so thoroughly with his secret spies, that every motion which indicates a desire to quit the service is known and prevented, and they remain little better than prisoners or slaves for life. I preferred, and I dare say you will think very naturally, the more liberal terms and more soldier-like employment of Hussun Ghiljee.

“So strongly am I impressed with the deceitful and treacherous nature of Khoosheal Khan, that I never mean again to trust myself in his power. My knowledge of the country induced these merchants to engage me as a guide and guard to its borders; and their high wages tempted a soldier of fortune like me to comply. But I have stipulated, as they well know, that I leave them at the first carawul of the khan’s dominions; and that, I shall accordingly do, one day’s journey after we cross the Attock.”

Such was my countryman’s narrative, for which I expressed my thanks; and then craved his advice as to how I should conduct myself in dealing with the khan. “I comprehend the full difficulty of my part,” said I, “and must entreat you to assist me with your experience. Think you, do we run any danger as travellers accompanying these merchants?”—“Your question,” replied he, “is

a proof of how little you are prepared for the man with whom you will have to deal. Yon sun does not more surely shine in heaven than you would be of detention and captivity, unless you can find some effectual means of evading it. The cruel and the crafty are always suspicious and jealous: your very arrival unannounced would awaken mistrust in a man who dreads, or at least watches, the approach of every traveller, and who knows instantly of every one that enters his territories. No: there must be no concealments: you must report yourself as a Patan from Rohilcund* if you like, and can support the character. These Patans are blood of the Eussuffzehees, and should be well received by the parent clan; but beware of admitting yourself to be a Persian. The Affghauns hate us for having conquered them: the independent clans fear and are jealous of us. If indeed you could contrive to throw yourself upon his protection, and to claim his safe conduct as a boon of hospitality, it might lessen your danger."

"I might take the sanctuary of his table," said I: "the Affghauns, I believe, regard it as sacredly as we Persians."—"No," replied he, "that is not the Affghaun custom; but they have a custom which is of equal sacredness and force: they term it *nunnawauttee*. If you desire to receive a favour from any man among these clans,

* A province of India, peopled by a colony of Patans, or Affghauns.

be he khan or ryot, you must repair before him and proclaim yourself his guest; but at the same time declare that you will accept of no office of hospitality; that you will neither taste of his salt nor share his carpet, unless he consents to grant your request; and this request, so demanded, be it for protection only, or for more efficient assistance, he cannot consistently with Affghaun honour deny, provided it be at all within the bounds of reason.

“Your best course, I think, will be when you approach Joodara, where the khan at present resides, to push forward a-head of the party; present yourself at the gate of the castle; demand admittance on the plea of business with the khan; and then claim his protection in the manner I have told you. Make it part of your request that you shall be forwarded safe out of his territories to those of such neighbouring chieftain as may best suit your views; and he will surely perform his promise and redeem his pledge, at whatever violence to the more evil promptings of his mind.”

I cannot but allow that this account of the person into whose hands I was about to commit my fate gave me lively concern; yet, unhabituated to fear, and relying perhaps too much upon my usual good fortune, and, above all, unprovided with any more promising course to pursue, I resolved to follow the advice of my friend Daoood, and to

claim the Affghaun chief's protection in the manner and custom of his country. The dubious aspect of the future, however, threw a damp over my spirits, which a superstitious person might have considered as ominous.

The country, after passing the hills which occurred in our second day's journey, became rough, and varied with wood and rock ; but the coldness of the weather had already nipped the verdure.

On the fourth day we made a stretch to cross the Attock river, which we did nearly opposite the point where it is joined by the Boorrundoo stream, encamping at the small village of Moonere. On the fifth day, my friend Daood having, as he promised, seen us to the borders of the khan's territory, recommended us to proclaim ourselves at once his guests ; gave us his " khodah Hafiz ;" and turning his horse without a moment's halt, soon, I have no doubt, placed the Attock between him and the chance of being arrested by the retainers of Khoosheal Khan.

Next day, the caravan having reported themselves as proceeding to Joodara, and guests of the khan, were accompanied part of the way by one of the guards in charge of the out-posts. And here, having learned that the residence of the khan was not more than a long day's journey distant from our munzil, I resolved to push forward with Noor Mahomed as soon as our horses should

have been rested, in order to pursue the advice of our friend Daood, and to anticipate any reports to our prejudice.

Instead of finding any objection urged against this plan from the guards at this out-post, no sooner had I stated that I had business for the khan's private ear than an Affghaun in his service immediately presented himself as our guide, and proposed to accompany me to the presence of his master. He was a tall, heavy, indolent-looking young man, clad in dark garments and a leathern cuirass; and appeared, I must say, a true specimen of Affghaun stupidity. He did his best, as we rode along, to pick out from Noor Mahomed and myself the nature of our business; but so clumsily did he go to work, and so inartificially did he put his sleepy questions, that there was neither merit nor difficulty in evading them. I must do him the justice to say, that we had no cause to complain of incivility or disobligingness; and certainly if he gained but little intelligence from us, we equally failed of extracting information from him; for excepting a few vague expressions in praise of the khan his master, who he assured us was a brave man,—a worthy excellent person, and condescending, kind to the last degree—not one sentence could we elicit to make us in any degree better acquainted with the chief in whose power we were so soon to find ourselves.

Resting for a few hours of the night with the mullick of a little village, we mounted again at day-break and pursued our way. In consequence of the prize I had secured in the horse and arms of the dead soldier, my appearance was altered considerably for the better; and forced by necessity to assume a feigned name, I determined to retain the Patan name which I had just adopted, and apply to it a plausible story for the ear of the Eussuffzehee chief. Before we had ridden an hour the path which wound along the right bank of the Boorrundoo river, among stunted brushwood, rocky hills, and scattered cultivation hanging in terraces upon the slopes, at length ascended a projecting range, and enabled us to look down upon a scene of very considerable beauty.

“Behold the country of the Lawezehees!—behold the dwelling of Koosheal Khan!” said our Affghaun guide, with an air of importance, and a proud glance at us, as the valley opened up under our eye, displaying a fine variety of prospect. The stream which flowed rapidly in the centre was bordered by a stripe of cultivation of considerable breadth and richness. A fair succession of smaller glens sent down their tribute of waters from ridges of rocky forest-covered hills, which shut in the landscape on either side, terminating in bare cliffs. Lofty mountains of dark blue, whose spiry summits were clad in eternal snows,

closed up the prospect in distant perspective. Many villages dotted the sides and points of the rising ground above the valley, and the smokes which issued from the lesser glens gave token that they were not without inhabitants. At the distance of two or three miles appeared the large and thriving village of Joodara, the residence of the chief, covering the ridge of a rising ground, of which the most elevated end was occupied by its kallah, or castle: it looked, as it was in truth, the mistress of the surrounding valley.

Nor did Joodara lose any of its interest upon a nearer view. Gardens of fruit-trees and vines, mingled with noble walnuts, plane, and mulberry-trees, skirted the town, (for it was far beyond a village,) of which the flat-roofed houses rose in terraced succession up the sides and easier slopes of the rising ground; and the castle, an extensive and somewhat gloomy structure, with walls of stone and lime, furnished here and there with round towers and bastions, crowned the top of the rocky eminence, inclosing a considerable area. The outline of these walls was varied by several buildings, constructed either for convenience or defence; and the screened windows of one lofty structure, which rose above the dark precipice of rock, and overlooked the black foaming pools of the river, sufficiently indicated that it belonged to the harem of the khan.

Passing through a maze of walls surrounding gardens and houses interspersed with mulberry-trees and vines, we entered an irregular street, part of which formed the principal bazar, in which some dozen or two of shops displayed their rather scanty wares ; and yet there was about the place an air of comfort and plenty, which argued the presence of a fostering hand. The sort of lazy bustle that prevailed showed that the place was populous. A number of men accoutred in their quilted war-jackets, bearing swords, and long spears, or matchlocks, were sauntering indolently about ; others with unbound tunics and their loongees* thrown carelessly over their heads and shoulders, looked like rakes who had strayed from the baths after a debauch ; the peasants, in their coarse rough caps and felt cloaks, were bringing their produce to supply the daily demand ; women, in their long boorkhas, flitted about like spirits ; and all turned listlessly round to gaze upon the approaching strangers.

The maidaun or open space before the entrance of the kallah was occupied by groupes of men on horseback or on foot, as variously equipped as employed ; and numbers of handsome fair robust youths swarmed about the gates and in the guard-

* Long cotton sheets or scarfs of various colours, used as wrappers or girdles by the Affghauns.

rooms annexed to it. Some of these were handsomely clad in mail or plate armour, with swords, shields, spears, and matchlocks ; others only wore a leathern cuirass, or a thick quilted sword-proof jacket of silk or cotton. Some lounged carelessly on charpaees* of leather or cordage, covered with a quilted rezai ; others leant lazily against the wall, watching with listless eye the amusements of their comrades in the maidaun.

These amusements consisted of shooting at marks with bows and arrows, or matchlocks, or in exercising their skill in the use of the sword or the battle-axe upon the various substances and in the innumerable ways which are commonly made use of for that purpose ; and truly so little cautious were they in the use of their weapons, or so little did they heed the danger or lives of others, that we were aware of the bullets whistling and the arrows singing very close to us, as we rode up to the gateway. An air of listless haughtiness—of idle independence, amounting even to an indolent defiance of order, characterised the deportment of all these youths in greater or less degree ; and it occurred to me, as I looked at them, that never was there better stuff for soldiers, while, to judge by appearances, never was there less good use made of it.

* Rude bedsteads or frames of couches, on four feet, whence the name.

A few words from our guide to the guards at the gate, in the Pushtoo tongue, which I did not understand, procured our admission into the outer court, which was spacious, and contained buildings for the accommodation of both men and horses belonging to the khan's establishment. Dis-mounting here, we were ushered by an esseckaghassee* along a winding passage, into an assemblage of buildings which, from being occupied by persons like men of business, I conjectured to consist of various offices; and in fact these were, I found, the secretaries and moollahs connected with the family and public departments of the khan's government.

At this place a chamberlain came forward and received us, demanding to know our business. On being informed that we came as guests, but declined stating either our names or business until in the presence of the khan, he left us to report accordingly. A quarter of an hour now elapsed before the chamberlain returned to say that the khan his master was graciously pleased to receive us; and after passing through another tortuous approach, we reached a screen of embroidered cloth, which being lifted to one side, displayed a handsome court laid out in plots of flowers and garden shrubs, with a pond of clear

* An officer equivalent to a groom of the chambers or master of ceremonies.

water in the middle. A fair range of buildings occupied the lower end of this court, having in the centre a hall or open apartment much resembling our dewankhanehs in Persia. It rose supported on lofty wooden pillars and scalloped or Saracenic arches of great height; the whole arches themselves being occupied by screens of carved wood covered with oiled paper, for the transmission of light and exclusion of the external air. The interior of the hall, highly carved and ornamented with painted work, had galleries running round the internal walls, arcaded and adorned in the same fashion, and opening into smaller apartments above. The walls themselves were stuccoed with a white glittering substance, which shone like silver, and formed a happy contrast with the painted work upon it. The floor was covered with rich Herât carpets and handsome numuds; and all the doors which opened into the hall were curtained with embroidered crimson cloth.

At the upper corner of this handsome apartment was seated the khan himself, upon a richly embroidered silk musnud, and leaning against a cushion covered with brocade. These particulars, it may be supposed, were the result of after examination; for at first my whole attention was riveted to the person of the khan himself—the arbiter of our fate; which, seated as he was, at the open low-silled window, I could see almost entirely

from the station where I had been placed by the chamberlain, in order to converse with him ; for my apparent or assumed rank did not entitle me to admission into the apartment itself.

The khan was a man of forty years or more, of grave demeanour, and a noble presence. His stature, when he stood upright, was lofty, and his person, though large-boned and square built, was but little inclined to fulness. A large but well-formed nose, strongly marked eyebrows, and keen grey piercing eyes, with very dark eye-lashes, were the remarkable features of his countenance. Its lower parts were chiefly covered by a thick curling beard of a rich ruddy brown colour, bordering upon red. Such were his features ; but it was the peculiar expression with which they were imbued that chiefly fixed my attention. Those keen grey eyes shot their searching glance into the very soul of him on whom they were bent ; but scarcely was their effect perceived, than the fierce intensity of their gaze faded as it seemed in a moment, as a filmy cloud will sometimes veil the noon-tide sun, till they cast only a bland regard, calculated rather to encourage than appal the beholder. At the same time the close wrinkling of the broad and noble brow, and the harsh lines which the momentary emotion would draw around the mouth, perceptible even through the bushy beard, would suffer a corresponding change ; so that the stern, and

almost terrifying character of the countenance passed, swift as the flitting shadow, into all the sunshine of a radiant smile. Still, even in that smile did danger seem to lurk, and whether it was the influence of previous reports, or that the lines of his wary features did in reality bear the stamp of dissimulation and perfidy, it struck me that the sage accustomed to read the character in the countenance, could scarce desire to see these qualities more strongly marked than in the features and aspect of Khoosheal Khan.

It is said that the peculiarities of dress have no small reference to those of character. I know not if it be so generally, but in the present case little was to be gathered from this source. The khan's dress was plain, though rich and becoming his station : a tunic of dusky yellow shawl, made in the Persian fashion, was girt around him by a dark red girdle of the same material, in which was thrust a short, gold-mounted Affghaun knife, sheathed in crimson velvet. A dark-coloured cloak, or barounee of shawl, worked in a rich pattern, and lined and trimmed with fur, hung from the shoulders, gracefully around his person ; and on his head he wore an embroidered silk cap, trimmed with sable fur.

“ Health and prosperity to the exalted Khoosheal Khan ! ” exclaimed the airuzbeggee, in loud and respectful tones ; “ two strangers wait to kiss the

dust of his feet.”—“ The strangers are welcome ! —they are our guests : let them approach,” said the khan, in the still louder tones of self-satisfied greatness. “Punah-be-khodawund-e-khan,”* exclaimed I, coming forward on hearing this permission, and laying my hands upon the wood-work of the window-sill, at which the khan was seated. “ I am your guest, my lord—your servant ! and I throw myself on your protection. But your servant comes in nunnawautee, and he cannot receive your hospitality ; he can neither sit upon the carpet which your favour may spread for him, nor eat of the salt your liberality may provide for him until you shall graciously grant his humble petition !”

The countenance of the khan expressed unqualified surprise. “ Stranger,” said he after a pause, “ with you we are unacquainted ; but that you know us is plain, since you have sought our dwelling ; and that you are aware of the Affghaun customs is no less clear, since you have claimed our hospitality under one the most revered among them. But deal thou fairly with us : let us be on an equality at least in knowledge of each other. Say who and what are you ?”—“ Nay, my lord, I entreat your reply to my appeal, then shall thy servant disclose his name and business.”—“ Stranger, I have told thee that we hold the custom sacred.

* Protection from my lord the khan.

As an Affghaun, I cannot refuse compliance, and thou hast already heard me call thee guest; yet as the head of a tribe who look to me for protection and vigilant attention to their welfare, such pledges must be qualified: beware of seeking to entrap me into aught that may ill consist with my duty."

"My lord," replied I, "the pledge, the promise I require, can in nowise interfere with that duty which you perform so well. I require for myself and friend, while in your dominions, inviolable safety in person and in liberty; and I desire such guidance and safe conduct as the laws of hospitality to a guest prescribe, to certain of the neighbouring tribes and chiefs, so far as your influence may extend, upon the road to Jelallabad or Caubul. It is little more than is warranted by the customs of your land to the coming guest, or than the most scrupulous host would voluntarily bestow; yet it imports us much to know ourselves assured of it." The khan examined me with his searching eyes: the faithless are ever suspicious. It was plain that in this caution of mine he dreaded some deep-laid purpose; but after a pause of some moments he said,—“Stranger, thy conduct, thy request is singular; but it is granted:—now say to whom?”

"My lord, your servant Yussuff is of Patan origin, and comes from the eastern provinces of

Hindostan, in the armies of which he has served. The late disturbances in that country destroyed his occupation : business leads him to Caubul, and thither he was proceeding when he found his share in the perils of the time, being robbed along with his friend of all they had, and so severely hurt, as to delay his further progress. In this condition they were overtaken by the march of the great Persian army, which rendered all journeying by the usual routes too dangerous to be attempted ; thy servants therefore joined themselves to a small caravan proceeding hither, in hopes that they might reach their journey's end by a safer, although a more circuitous road. But their business having been so long delayed by their misfortunes, the greater speed becomes needed, that they may be yet in time to secure their objects ; and thus it is that thy servant has been induced to stipulate, perhaps in too urgent a manner, for such aid as may best provide against further and fatal detention."

Thrice while I spoke did the khan bend his eyes upon my face with all their eagle keenness ; and as many times did that searching keenness fade in a moment into the bland smile of encouragement which I have described. Once, when I alluded to my Patan parentage ; again, when I described the disaster which had delayed our journey ; and a third time, while I was detailing

my reasons for travelling by the circuitous route of Boonere: nor could I help being thrown into some confusion under these piercing glances, while conscious of uttering an untruth.

“A Patan, you say?” repeated the khan in a tone of doubtful inquiry;—“yet you do not speak the language.”—“Your servant has been long absent from his home, and has lived where Persian was principally spoken.”—“Ah! is Persian thus spoken then in Hindostan? Methought the tones and accent there were different; but I was wrong, doubtless:—what can we poor mountaineers know of the courtly usages and style of Shahjehanabad? And so you were plundered, and wounded?”—“Yes, my lord.”—“What! robbed of every thing?”—“Ay, left almost naked.”—“And yet you seem tolerably clothed and armed at present:—you doubtless fell in with very charitable persons after your misfortune?” I told him the whole of our adventure on the road, which appeared to arrest his attention strongly. “Shahwash!” exclaimed he, half ironically, yet with a degree of energy which proved him not unmoved—“you must be a stout hand at the sword.—But stay—I forget the part of a *host*,”—laying an emphasis upon the word;—“you have journeyed far, and must be fatigued; ascend, thou and thy friend, and be seated; we shall converse more at ease.”

“Your favour is great,” said I, inwardly cursing it, however; for I feared this condescension, which was probably not without its object. Nor was I mistaken; the conversation proved to be a series of cross questions and observations, to which I felt it most difficult to reply. It seemed as if the khan had already penetrated my disguise, although too polite to say so; and often and bitterly did I repent of having followed that part of my friend Daood’s advice which suggested the adoption of a feigned character. More than once was a confession of the truth upon my tongue’s end, but as often did the khan pass off from the unpleasing subject, as if he saw that it was painful to me; and at length he dismissed me, commending us both to the care of the nazir of his household, who had orders to supply us with every comfort.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBLE-DEALING.

THREE days passed on in quietness and ease, and I became anxious to resume our journey. I therefore waited on the khan, who received me with his customary politeness; but when I signified my wishes, he assured me that the country between Joodara and the passes towards Jelallabad was in much too disturbed a condition for safe travelling, and that he could not by any means permit a friend and guest whom he valued to pass beyond the limits of his own authority for the present. "We have made ourselves responsible for your safety," said he, "and your blood would be upon our head were any evil to befall you after quitting this place during a perilous time, with our consent." It was not my business to irritate the khan, or to afford him any handle for throwing off this responsibility; so I was fain to admit the excuse, though dubious of its sincerity.

Strolling into the bazar a short while after this interview, I met with some of the Taujuck merchants, my late caravan companions; and in course of conversation with them was made aware of a report, which I did not hear without alarm. It was said that Nadir, enraged at the refusal of the Eussuffzehee chiefs, either to repair to his presence, or to furnish him with the supplies of men and stores he required, had detached a large force against them, with orders to spare neither men nor time in bringing them to their senses, and forcing them to obedience. Even while I remained talking with these men did fresh accounts arrive in the place confirmative of the same tidings; and it was plain by the increased bustle and the angry stir which speedily arose in it, that preparations of some sort were already commencing.

I could not avoid feeling that my own position must become extremely critical, if such a measure should be taken on the part of my late master; and a doubt regarding the expedience of the course we had taken, which for some little time had begun to haunt my mind, revived with more force. Still the question of "what better could be done?" remained unanswerable as before, and reconciled me to a prospect which was not in itself too cheering.

On the following day I once more attended the audience hall of the khan, in hopes of learning

something more conclusive concerning this interesting subject. A crowd which had already filled the court when I entered, prevented my observing what was going on ; but I saw the khan in his customary seat, and, as it appeared, earnestly occupied. There was something of evil foreboding in the impulse which induced me to press forward to see what might be the matter ; and the guards and young men in attendance recognising me as the khan's guest, made room for me to pass, so that in a moment I found myself within the circle of attendants, and in full view of the khan, and of every person in the presence.

Having made my obeisance in the usual form, my eyes mechanically turned towards the space in front of the chief, and it may be imagined with what feelings I perceived three men clad in the Persian habit, who with arms bound, and dress very much disordered, stood in charge of several Affghauns, with drawn swords in their hands. The trifling movement caused by my approach made these men turn round at the very moment when my eye was upon them. Unfortunately for me, perhaps for both, the recognition was mutual and instantaneous. I knew them for soldiers long in the royal service, and belonging to the corps of Jalloyers, which had often been under my command ; and they did not fail as readily to recol-

lect their old commander. “Ai, afsoos !* khan,” exclaimed they in the Persian language, “and have you, like us, fallen into the den of the wolf?”

Lightning is not more rapid nor more fiery than the glance which shot towards me from the eye of the khan at this unfortunate discovery : nor does the cloud from whence it issues close over it more quickly and return to its dull hue, than did his countenance resume its calm and placid aspect. But it was enough ;—concealment was at an end. And oh, how bitterly did I regret it had ever been resorted to ! Such regrets were however vain ; and I prepared to bide the storm, which doubtless was about to burst upon me.

During the slight confusion into which I was thrown by this unexpected incident, and the attention it drew upon me, I had attempted to silence the men by a sign, indicating my desire to remain unknown ; and my eyes were thus for a few seconds diverted from the khan. But in less than a minute after, one of his personal attendants approached me, and respectfully intimated his master’s desire that I should enter the dewan-khaneh and take a seat. I obeyed ; and the airuzbeggee indicated a seat far higher than usual ; on my way to which the chief, half-rising from

* Alas ! alas !

his own seat, as is the custom towards persons of rank, acknowledged me with one of his kindest-looking smiles. "Strange this," thought I, with an emotion of mistrust, as I saw myself the object of so much misplaced civility. "Heaven grant that it may be for good!"

The khan now gave directions, in my hearing, that the men should be placed under a guard; but well entertained, and suffer neither insult nor ill-treatment; an order which quieted my immediate apprehensions on their account: and not long after, dismissing the audience and greater number of his attendants, he turned his person and his attention to me. After a few expressions of customary civility, which, however, were uttered in the most courteous tone, he continued to say,—
"The circumstance which has just occurred has only confirmed a fact, of which, permit me to say, I was before aware. I mean that you, my guest, were a Persian. To discover this required but little penetration. Of your rank, whatever may have been my suspicions, I was ignorant; and let this, I pray you, be my excuse for all short comings of attention. It remains for you to complete the imperfect information which accident has afforded, and to favour me with the true motives of your visit to my country."

Surprise at this very unlooked-for result to so threatening an incident kept me silent for a mo-

ment. But suspicion was still awake as I asked myself more than once what the chief's ultimate view could be? what he could purpose by this overstrained courtesy to one who had attempted so grossly to deceive him? At last I replied: "Khan! the confusion I have felt and still feel in your presence, is but a just punishment for the attempt I have made to deceive you. It was the suggestion of another, and I suffer as I ought to do for rejecting the more honest promptings of my own judgment and of right feeling, in favour of an advice which I could not approve of. It is true, I am a Persian; but as in the first instance I scarcely thought of appealing to your lordship, I saw no necessity for awakening your suspicions, or risking my own detention, by declaring this uncalled for: my conduct should have been altered with my arrangements, and I now regret that it was not so.—But to proceed—I have been an officer in the service of that prince, who, now it is said, has resolved upon invading these remote regions.—I am so no longer: and the rest of my story is true. My friend and myself have been plundered, and we are anxiously desirous to return to our families, which are exposed to great dangers in our absence." I then related succinctly the substance of our real story, suppressing however the worst particulars of the ill usage we had experienced from our late master.

The khan listened to the recital with silence and attention, only now and then uttering an ejaculation of sympathy or of abhorrence as the circumstances of our disgrace were touched upon. "By the soul of my father, this is but sorry treatment for a faithful servant!" said he, when I had done; "and a tyrant deserves no better than to lose his most zealous adherents when he makes them dogs to spurn at, as this shah of yours has done. I do not wonder that you have renounced him; I only marvel he continues to retain so many friends as do stick by him. But suppose now he should become wiser, and hold out the salutation of pardon and peace to his old dishonoured servants, think you that you could resist the invitation? have you so utterly abandoned his service, that you never would again receive his salt, nor draw your sword under his banner?"

"My lord," replied I, "they know little of Nadir who believe that he will ever unsay what he has once said, or repent of what he has once done, or reverse a sentence that he once has pronounced:—and if he could so belie his nature, could we, his faithful, zealous, trusted servants forget that we have been disgraced, and again repose confidence where it has been so signally violated?—My service with Nadir is over, and for ever:" and my throat swelled almost to choking as the truth of this declaration—for then I thought it was true

—came home with force upon my mind, and I could not continue the sentence.

“And yet,” said the khan, “you think of returning to Persia, where you must for ever lie under his eye and hand, and where he may crush you like a worm when his caprice moves him to do so.”

—“My lord, we Iraunees love the soil which bred us: its rocks and its plains, its weeds and its flowers are dear to our very souls. Our hearts are light: the land is wide: the lordly lion and the humble mouse dwell there and cross not each others paths:—the sparrow takes its little flight unharmed of the soaring eagle:—and the king’s wrath will pass away—he will cease to threaten his old servant’s life. Besides, my lord, we have families—families whom we love, and to whom our prolonged absence may be fatal.”

A sarcastic smile slightly curled the thick beard as well as the features of the khan. “A family?” he repeated—“ah, a family! But suppose, were another service to be placed in your offer—a better, surer service, under a master of a different stamp—suppose such a thing, might you not be tempted to accept it?”—“No, khan,” replied I with firmness: “my first duty, my first wish, is to see my family—to place it in safety; and until that be the case I accept no service, nor turn to the right hand or the left in journeying on to reach them.”—“But think—the way is far, the path is full of

dangers: even were you to leave this place immediately, it is a thousand chances to one that you never reach Mushed. The evil you dread would then fall upon your family; and in addition they would lose their best hope, their head, rashly thrown away in the vain attempt of doing impossibilities to succour them.”—“The khan has spoken the truth,” replied I; “the way *is* long and the dangers many, but the lives of men are in the hand of God. The fate which was stamped by the Almighty on this forehead cannot but be accomplished; and if that fate be to perish in the path of duty, whether in the field or in the dungeon, by flood or by fire, Ismael desires not to shun it.”

“But reflect: be calm, and look into this matter,” urged the khan. “It is true, as thou sayest, that the appointed fate of man must be accomplished; but he is not therefore warranted in rushing wilfully to seek that fate; the law of God declares that man shall use the obvious and lawful means committed to him for the purpose of self-preservation. Be wise,—be just; a little delay may save a great evil. These disturbed times will pass away, and you may then pursue your path in safety. Suppose,” continued he, assuming a still more gracious and confidential tone, and leaning towards me—“suppose,—I am going to be frank with you—that you were to remain for

some time with me. I require skilful and zealous officers: my Affghaun young men are able and willing, but altogether unskilful in the practices of war: to you these are familiar; stay and instruct them;—be my general and my friend: dictate your own terms, and you will find my liberality will surpass them. Then after a time return to Persia for your family, and bring them to a sure asylum—to a friend who will not fail you.”

The countenance of the khan grew more animated as he unmasked his real views and pressed his tempting offers upon me; but the smile gave way to a darkening gloom as he saw the unbending determination of my soul, and heard my decided reply. “The khan is very gracious; he has vouchsafed much favour and honour to his servant; but he entreats forgiveness; he is unhappy in that he cannot accept of the khan’s munificence. He is bound by duty and by promise to visit Khorasan without delay. Besides, let truth be told, should its words prove the sentence of fate: my lord is now about to draw his sword against the shah of Persia. Long has thy servant eaten his salt, and accursed is he who injures the hand which once cherished him. Never shall the arm of thy servant be lifted against Nadir, the patron and protector of his youth: this is his unalterable resolution. And now, O khan! forget not that Ismael is thy guest: he deceived thee it is true

as to country and name, but his mind was blameless towards thee. To thee it was the same whether Yussuff the Patan, or Ismael Keerkloo were thy guest for these few fleeting days. By the sacred name of *guest* then do I claim thy promise, to be safely, and without delay, conveyed so far as thy power extends towards Jelallabad."

Long did the khan combat my resolutions, and many were the shapes in which he sought by temptation, by persuasion, and by a formidable array of danger and difficulty, to make me alter it. And it was a striking thing to see the command of temper which during this long discussion he displayed; although the cloud did more than once darken his brow. At length he ceased to contend; and I shall not easily forget the peculiar and constrained expression of both face and tone with which, drawing himself up, he said, "It is well: thy refusal disappoints me, but thy obstinacy triumphs: thou hast my promise, and shalt see its performance. On the morning after to-morrow be thou and thy friend in readiness; on that day an escort true and brave shall wait on thee, until thou art clear of the limits of my sway: beyond I can neither influence, nor answer for events. Thou knowest the dangers and difficulties of the attempt, and enterest upon it with thine eyes fully open: on thy own head therefore be the consequences;

I dismiss my guest in safety and in peace, and am guiltless and clear of them."

Ominous and solemn as was this disclamatory warning, I was rejoiced beyond measure at the thoughts of so speedily resuming our journey. Whatever might be the dangers to be encountered, they were not likely to surpass those we had already escaped, and which had beset us here; and after expressing my thanks to the khan for all his kindness, I returned to our quarters to communicate these good tidings to Noor Mahomed.

That very evening the khan's nazir came to our apartment in charge of a handsome entertainment from the kitchen of his master, which was set before us with high respect. The feast was attended by several of the khan's officers, who came to pay their respects, and whom I invited to partake with us. This they declined, but remained conversing with us in such sort as the imperfect knowledge of each others language—for they spoke only the Pushtoo tongue—enabled us to do. We had many visitors in the course of this evening, and among them one whose peculiarly ill-favoured appearance was the only cause of my remarking him at all; for the view I had of him was but imperfect, and the darkness too great for exact observation. He was a gaunt, raw-boned figure of great size, who wore the Affghaun cap

and turban over bold forbidding features, rendered more revolting by a pair of squinting eyes; and his person was wrapped in a thick felt cloak. He was, they said, a relative of the khan's, who came according to that chief's desire to pay us his respects; and he was introduced by the name of Keflar Khan. He remained however but a few minutes; and soon after his departure the nazir and his whole party quitted our apartment, repeating the admonition to be prepared for marching on the next succeeding morning, when our escort should be ready to attend us according to the orders of the khan.

Who is there that has passed through this earthly pilgrimage without occasionally experiencing certain of those ominous forebodings, those whisperings of things about to be, which frequently precede important and fatal events; and which, were man more heedful, and less blindly rash, might serve as useful warnings to prepare him for his fate? Few junctures of consequence, in my own career at least, have come upon me unannounced by such mysterious intimations, either palpable at the time, or subsequently recognised: and such a dim visiting of Providence did I consider the singular dream which oppressed me this night; although some might have attributed it to the impressions made upon my mind by the agitating conversations of the preceding day.

Without that consciousness of sleep which often accompanies a dream, I found myself, as I thought, upon a wide plain, above which shone the azure sky, sprinkled with innumerable stars. While gazing upon the brilliant vault, my attention was arrested by the sound of a voice, which pronounced my name in solemn accents. I looked, and beheld the dim figure of a dervish, in whose shadowy outline methought I could distinguish the form of him whose counsels had so often influenced my early life. "Ismael!" said the voice, "beware!—the lustre of thy star is dimmed. Look to thy steps:" and my eye turned mechanically to the deep blue sky above me, where my own auspicious star was wont to burn with clear unvarying brilliancy. But it was not to be seen; and after a while I saw a little dark cloud occupying its place in the heavens. A mournful sensation came over me; and I was still occupied in contemplating this emblem of my darkened fate when its faint and half-quenched beam appeared, struggling to pierce through the densest portion of the cloud, as if about to shine forth with renewed glory. "Behold," said I, triumphantly turning to the shadowy monitor—but he was gone; and in his place appeared the gaunt person and ill-favoured face of the Affghaun, Keftar Khan, whose countenance had struck me so forcibly on the preceding evening. He now stretched forth his arm as if pointing out

my way, and it was his hand that had interposed like a cloud to hide from me the influence of my protecting star.

The scene too had changed with the swift inconsistency of nightly visions, and the Affghaun was beckoning me with a hideous mockery of courtesy, along a narrow path which terminated in a precipice of fearful depth. I strove to free myself from his guidance, but was horror-struck at finding myself impelled forwards by some unseen and irresistible force : my efforts increased to violent struggles, while the face of my guide became more fiendish as these struggles failed and I approached the gulf. Other and well-known voices mingled their tones in my ears ; but methought there was one above the rest, which in tones more felt than heard, exhorted me to “beware ! and be firm !” and with these words thrilling through my very soul I awoke, bathed in perspiration, the effect of my real struggles while under the influence of ideal agitation.

It would be vain to deny that this dream had a strong effect upon my mind : I considered it as the presage of some impending misfortune, although it was impossible to guess from what quarter it should be apprehended. The khan had most unequivocally pledged his honour for our safety while in his dominions ; nor had we any reason to mistrust the pledge ; and I sought to throw off the

uncomfortable weight which lay upon my spirits. But it was in vain ; nor could Noor Mahomed, to whom I had communicated the cause of my uneasiness, although he endeavoured to make light of it in conversing with me, avoid being equally depressed with myself. Still, what was to be done ? —nothing but to be patient ; to watch events, and shape our conduct by them.—“ God is great !” said I ; “ without his will no evil can befall us ; and if it be his pleasure, he can save us harmless, even though the knife were at our throats.”

Our preparations did not occupy us long ; we had little more to carry than the clothes and arms we wore. In the stuffing of the saddle belonging to the dead soldier’s horse, to which I had fallen heir, I had found, stowed away, a tolerable supply of gold ; which, with that which remained of my own store, was disposed of in small parcels about the persons of Noor Mahomed and myself, in such a manner, as might leave the best chance of some portion escaping even the strictest search, short of being stript to the skin.

On this evening also, the khan, who seemed anxious that we should quit the place impressed with the most favourable notions of his hospitality, after requesting to see us, and loading us with the most flattering compliments, upon our return to our own apartments, sent us handsome presents in dress and arms, together with a well-accoutred

horse a-piece, adding the expression of his hopes that they would bear us safely, and that we might reach our homes in peace.

Early on the morrow, according to appointment, we were roused to commence our journey. Ten young Affghauns, four of them mounted on stout northern horses, and the rest on foot, all under the command of an officer of the khan's household, were ready to escort us. I will not say that the natural emotions of joy at finding ourselves thus clear of Joodara, and in full march up the valley of Boonere, were not a little checked by a still remaining depression of spirits; the consequences, perhaps, of the unpleasant suspicions we had at first formed of the khan's intentions, united with the recollections of my ominous dream. Nor would it have been difficult to persuade ourselves, perhaps, had we given way to the moody feeling, that the stout, active, and well-armed troop by which we were escorted, might be a guard conducting us to perpetual captivity, rather than protecting us for a certain distance upon our journey homewards; but we combatted these uncomfortable suggestions of a diseased mind, whenever they became palpable, and sought amusement in pleasing anticipation, or in the increasing wildness and majesty of the scenes around us.

The first day's journey carried us far up the Boonere valley, disclosing a succession of well-

cultivated glens, which opened upon the Boorundoo, swelling its waters with their respective streams. At night we were hospitably entertained in a village, where the rude manners and appearance of the inhabitants was compensated by an honest frankness and sincerity of welcome, which could only have their origin in true kindness of heart.

Next morning our course slanted to the left; we ascended gradually, and became involved among a maze of lofty ridges and intricate glens, the sides of which were principally covered with forests, while their lower regions were varied with pasture and patches of terraced cultivation surrounding the villages. These were in general perched upon promontories of the hill, or occupied the crests of insulated rocks in the vallies, occurring not unfrequently at the junction of two streams. The aspect of the country and its inhabitants, increasing in peculiarity and wildness, declared that we were reaching the remoter terminations of those valleys which stretch down from the roots of the Hindoo-Coosh. Fresh pangs of suspicion began to shoot through our minds with this conviction, for my information gave me no reason to suppose that the passes into the neighbouring valley of Swaut lay so high up among the hills. I took occasion to remark this to the officer of our escort, who contented himself

with assuring me that he was obeying the commands of his chief, which were to conduct us into Swaut.

The third day at length carried us to the top of a long and lofty pass, from which, high raised above the forests, we looked over many ranges of mountainous and undulating ground, upon a fair and varied valley. "Behold the Swaut!" said the officer, addressing me: "these are the lands of the Accozehee clans, with whom we are at feud: beyond this pass the power of Khoosheal Khan does not extend; nor can we accompany thee further. Stranger, farewell! The chief of the Lawezehees and of Boonere hath performed his promise: I take thee and all to witness of the same."—"But," said I, "is this the hospitality of the khan, to leave his guests upon a bleak and barren hill-top, without either food or shelter, and so near the fall of night?"—"Thou hast wanted neither food nor shelter," replied the officer, "so long as thou didst remain my master's guest; and again shouldst thou enjoy them if thou didst return as such. But it was thy will to depart, and he furnished thee with the means; and lo! here are guides who will conduct thee to the first village of the Aoul. But these men, upon the verge of whose territories we stand, are the enemies of Khoosheal Khan and his clans: we cannot trespass upon them without hazarding a fresh and

immediate quarrel; and this the khan will not do to gratify either stranger or guest, be he whom he may. Once more I bid thee farewell!" and, without biding further question, both officer and men turning their backs, and throwing their long spears and matchlocks over their shoulders, struck down the winding pass at a rapid pace.

It was impossible that a conduct so rude and abrupt,—so much at variance with the hospitality, real or affected, of the khan, could fail of awakening the strongest suspicions in minds already so keenly alive to the critical nature of our situation. We looked at each other with countenances reflecting back our respective apprehensions, but neither of us spoke; so uncomfortable were our thoughts, that we felt no desire to interchange them. From this unpleasant state of feeling we were roused by the impatient signals of the two guides who had remained, and who were endeavouring to indicate in that way, as well as by their unintelligible jargon, that it was high time to be moving onwards; and accordingly, as nothing was to be gained by delay, we followed them along the rugged tortuous path which led down towards the Swaut.

We might perhaps have proceeded thus for about two miles; trees and brushwood were again thickening around us; and we had reached a small hollow, where one or two petty ravines

from the crest of the mountain united together, pouring their waters into a single glen, when the screams of an eagle close above us startled and induced me to look round for the bird which had uttered them. The scream was repeated from several quarters; and while gazing around me in some surprise, my eye caught the glitter of spear-points rising above the bushes. “By the holy Kaaba, Noor Mahomed,” said I, “the dream was true!—we are betrayed:—it is all over with us now: but prepare for a stout defence.”—“Chushm!” responded he; “but by my head we shall find enough to do!—Wullah! there are more of them!—they are all around us:—I saw a lighted match in that thicket to the left.”—“Push on, push on!—keep the path:—quicker yet!” But at this moment the guides made a dart, one on each side, towards the jungle, and were out of sight in an instant; and at the same time upwards of twenty men, all completely armed and principally mounted, issued deliberately enough from the copse and hollows around us, with lighted matches and spears extended, blocking up all further advance. “Cut your way through them to the road beyond,” cried I to Noor Mahomed. “Bismillah! the first village may save us yet, if we can reach it;” and we were clapping stirrups to our horses, when a single Affghaun came forward and spoke in the Persian language:—“It is all vain,” said he: “be wise,

and submit. No ill is intended you, provided ye commit none: seek not idly to sacrifice a life, and thereby assuredly to lose your own. Were ye Zal and Roostum themselves, ye could do nothing here."

"The ghorumsaughs are right," said I to Noor Mahomed, dropping the point of my sword as I looked hopelessly round at the multitude of stout and well-armed foes, and thought of the trackless unknown jungle by which we were surrounded: "we are fairly in the wolf's jaws; our star is dimmed at present, but it may shine out yet again." In fact, I considered that without knowledge of the country our ultimate escape would be impossible, even should we succeed at the expense of a life or two to cut through the ring of enemies; while the price of blood would surely be demanded from us if we should spill it in so hopeless an attempt.

Turning therefore to the person who had just addressed us, I demanded what they wanted with travellers peaceably proceeding on their journey?—"Your submission," was his reply.—"And who is it that requires this of me?"—"Those whom you see before you," replied he, "and who will speedily compel it if you are mad enough to resist."—"And by whose directions are unoffending travellers thus unhospitably arrested and detained?" The man laughed scornfully.—"You

speak," said he, "as if you were now in the land of rahdars,* and posts, and had a thousand Kuzzilbashes at your heels; but you will find, should you have forgot it, that you are in the mountains of the free tribes of Affghanistan, who treat as they see fitting all who enter their country uninvited or unpermitted.—But no more words; give up your arms, or we take them."—"Hold," said I;—"do ye belong to Khoosheal Khan, or not?"—"We are our own masters, and do as seems good to us," returned he, with increasing impatience. "Submit, obey, or take the consequence."—"Do ye then swear that our lives and liberties shall be safe;—that no violence is intended."—"Your lives are safe," said he:—"as for liberty, you must accompany us just now;—thereafter depends not upon us." Further resistance or remonstrance would have been vain; so, throwing down my unbloody sword with a very painful effort, Noor Mahomed and I submitted to our fate.

Stript of our arms, our elbows pinioned behind our backs, and ourselves bound to our horses; a stout Affghaun on foot, with drawn swords and lighted matches, being stationed on either side, we were now led forward in the midst of the party. The path they took struck out of the

* Road-keepers, police.

more beaten track, about half a mile further on, and then slanted along the hill face, crossing the indentings of more than one chasm, which poured a little stream into the hollow below us. Evening was now closing in, and the way became obscure : but our guards seemed to know it well, and pursued it without stop or hesitation ; and although I could not determine the exact direction, I was perfectly sensible that, upon the whole, we were ascending. After a full hour's progress in this way, chiefly among scattered trees and small copse-wood, the nature of the ground changed somewhat suddenly ; the gloomy and indistinct forms of the mountains seemed to fade into dim vacuity ; and rounding a shoulder of the slope on which we had been travelling, a deep gloomy hollow appeared upon our left, the features of which were lost in the total obscurity of the night.

From the momentary halt and quick interchange of question and reply among our guards at this point, I imagined they were at a loss respecting the path ; and whether it were so in reality or not, the pitchy darkness might have furnished them with a fair apology. But the indecision was soon at an end ; for one or two being sent in advance, we all plunged after them into the depth of the thick forest, and committed ourselves to the dangers of a very rough and slippery path. The

instinct of our horses proved here of more use than the skill of their riders ; for, picking their steps as if it had been in broad daylight, they trod amongst the round and rugged stones and the deep slippery soil, scarcely making the smallest stumble or trip, until at length we reached the bottom of a deep hollow, where our ears were saluted with the roar of a stream.

Crossing this stream nearly girth deep, and with no small danger from the rapidity of the torrent and the roundness of the stones which formed its bed, we continued to ascend its right bank for another full hour ; when at length, to the no small comfort of all the party, a light gleaming among the trees saluted our eyes, and called forth from the foremost of them a loud shout.

We soon reached the spot from which it issued, and beheld some eight or ten men seated around a good fire, which they had made under an overhanging rock, a little removed from the bank of the stream. Upon hearing the shout, several of them started up and came forward to meet us ; and no small merriment was produced by the dialogue which ensued, in a language which I could not understand, although well did we know that our unhappy selves were its object.

On being dismounted and led into the cavern, the first object on which my eyes fell was a man

wrapped up in a cloak, who had retained his seat upon a numud spread on the ground by the fire, but who raised his head at our approach. The recognition was instantaneous;—it was the ill-favoured visage and ominous distorted eyes of Kestaf Khan, which were turned on me, with the same malicious and ironical smile that had glared upon me in my dream.

“Welcome,” said he, “welcome, khan!—Your place has been empty:—we rejoice to see you here.—Your health is good, I hope:—but stay, you are fatigued, doubtless;—pray be seated.—Here, men, hither with a numud;—the Persian khan would not deign to sit on the same carpet with a boorish Affghaun.—So, now unbind his arms, and do you, Sirundauz and Ghorawun, take your places as attendants behind his lordship.” And the loathsome ruffian continued to mingle sneers and taunts with the very offices of hospitality, which he was, no doubt, constrained by superior orders to perform for us, giving a convincing proof of the cheer we might expect if the power were more fully in his hands.

For the present, however, although strictly watched and cut off from every means of escape, our treatment in other respects was not to be complained of. Wholesome food was placed before us; our bonds were taken off, that we might eat in comfort; and when the meal was over, a

decent numud was provided for us to sleep on: and although the common precaution of throwing another over us, on each end of which a man lay down to prevent our rising unawares or escaping, it did not prove any inconvenience, and rather supplied a warmth, very desirable in so cold a night. In short, loss of liberty was the only real evil we had to complain of; and had it not been for the painful uncertainty which involved the future, we might have congratulated ourselves, so far at least, on the result of an adventure which had assumed so suspicious a character.

But however grateful for present comforts, to shut our eyes upon the future was impossible; and we exhausted our ingenuity in trying to elicit from those around us an explanation of the real motives of the violence practised towards us. But it was all in vain: most of them understood us not, the rest were too well tutored to reply. At length, wearied and harassed, we resigned ourselves to rest, which, notwithstanding our singular situation, had been rendered too necessary by the exertion of several days, not to prove very acceptable in any shape.

It was not until morning that we had a just comprehension of the singular and fantastic spot where we had passed the night. We were in a deep chasm, at the bottom of which ran a full stream, broken by fragments of rock into a thou-

sand rapids of foam, and black pools. From the bank of this stream, and forming one side of the ravine, a wall of dark rock rose, swerving rather forward from the perpendicular, to the height of many hundred feet. Its face was bare, except that clinging herbs and ferns had found rooting in the crevices ; and here and there a gnarled stump had fixed itself in some larger fissure, spreading abroad both roots and branches, like some great insect crawling on the black surface. The base of this rocky wall retreated inwards even yet more than the upper part ; in some places overhanging so much, as to afford a cavern perfectly sheltered from the weather, and capable of accommodating a far larger party than ours. That such a use was often made of it, was attested by the remains of numerous fire-places, and the smoke-blackened roof, with the cattle litter and other tokens of a traveller's resting-place ; and they told me that the place was in fact known in the country by the name of the Munzil-gah (or resting-place) of the cave.

The opposite bank of the ravine was covered with a thick forest of towering pines and great oaks, and a luxuriant underwood. The tops of the mountains retreated beyond sight ; but on gaining a more open view upwards, they might be seen bare of forest, but covered with grass, or sprinkled with grey cliffs, and spotted with yet

undissolved snow. All this I had time enough to examine while the party was preparing to proceed ; for I was anxious to note the direction of our course, as affording the best means of conjecturing the intentions of our captors, or of effecting our escape should an opportunity present itself. On their part, our guards, satisfied probably of our entire ignorance of the localities, and relying upon the intricacy of the country, paid little attention to the way in which we employed ourselves, provided we did not actually attempt to run away. To dream of such an attempt at this time would have been absolute madness ; so we waited until our conductors were prepared, and then quietly accompanied them.

The road, which though rugged and difficult, was plainly a frequented path, led still along the banks of the stream, crossing many tributary dells in its ascent, until the gradual rise carried us up among the cliffs which had been seen from a distance below, to a long arduous pass, winding among bare rocky summits, and along the brows of very ugly precipices, resembling some of those which I had seen in other parts of the country, but still more wild and bleak ; for the rocks were more splintered and weather-beaten, and the forests had been left still further below us, and great patches of snow lay thick on the shady sides of the slopes.

The pass after this toilsome ascent wound for

some time among the highest peaks of the mountains, and terminated at length in a descent, not unlike that on the western side, but through more arid and less fertile hills. From several points of this descent we looked over a dark and misty extent of forest, varied with patches of pasture land and cultivation, all very indistinct; and I now became persuaded of a fact which I had for some time strongly suspected,—that we had been seized by the orders of that very chief who had pretended to escort us in safety from his dominions, and that we were actually on our way back to them, in charge of his own people. My blood boiled at his treachery; but indignation or remonstrance were alike unavailing. I could only note events, to be made use of as opportunities might occur.

The particulars of our journey need not be dwelt upon. Before we halted at night it became obvious beyond all doubt that we were once more in the valley of Boonere, but in a far higher and remoter district of it than that around Joodara. By noon of the succeeding day, after traversing some difficult country, and descending by a pass not unworthy of the rest of the scenery, we came in sight of a castle, built upon one of those rocky islets or peninsulas, planted just in the gorge of a dark rugged hollow, which are so common in these mountains; and which reminded me somewhat of the “falcon’s nest” of the Ghiljee chief,

which it had been my lot to dismantle. But this was far more dark and gloomy; and the valley over which it frowned was less rich and smiling. The precipitous mountains by which it was almost overhung rendered it more difficult of approach to an invading enemy: but if once occupied, these mountains, commanding it so closely, would have rendered it less defensible. A sharp stream flowed down the chasm behind it, insulating the rock with its noisy but shallow current; and its best defences were its steep precipitous sides, which left no means of access, except by the regular approach, and that was always strongly guarded.

The decent respect with which, although as prisoners, we had been treated since our capture, had inspired a hope which was somewhat damped by the appearance of this place; for it did not long remain doubtful that our journey was for the present to end here. Still there remained sufficient room for speculating on what was to befall us, and it was not without a powerful interest, that upon entering the walls we followed our conductors through one or two courts until we reached an inclosure, containing several small but comfortable apartments; all of which, however, bore the appearance of having been fitted up in haste from a state of disrepair. Into one of these we were ushered by a respectable-looking person, who received us at the entrance of the court; and who,

judging from his appearance, might either have been an attendant upon some nobleman, or one of the officers attached to his dewan-khaneh.

This person showing us the apartment with all its conveniences, requested that we should consider it as our home : then pointing out separate sleeping chambers which entered from a balla-khaneh above, he informed us that these were also for our accommodation. Always anxious to elicit fresh information, I thanked the man for his politeness, but observed that the quarters assigned us were unnecessarily good for the short time we should occupy them, as we hoped that our detention could not prove of long continuance. But he, casting on us a scrutinising look, only bowed and kept silent, and soon after withdrew, informing us that a servant was in waiting within call, who should attend to our wants and perform our behests.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITER.

LEFT to ourselves, Noor Mahomed and I for the first time had leisure to talk over and discuss the singular nature of our adventure ; and though many a conjecture occurred to us, we each confessed ourselves fairly at fault as to the object of this most tantalising detention. The only probability which occurred to me was that of the khan still entertaining a hope of forcing us to accept his service ; but even this could not, we thought, account for the nature of our present treatment, and the regularly organised plan which had been laid for bringing us back from such a distance : and still more singular did it seem that we should not have been carried at once to Joodara, where the khan might have dealt with us according to his pleasure. But conjecture was vain ; patience was the only remedy, and to that perforce we resorted.

Towards the hour of evening-prayer a bustle at the entrance of our court announced an arrival,

and we soon saw as well as heard a person, handsomely habited in the Persian costume, but wearing the white turban of an Eussuffzehee wrapped round his cap, enter, with a numerous retinue, and approach our apartment. A servant who preceded him shouted forth both his name and titles, by which we were informed that the person who now honoured us so far, was to be considered as Nuwaz Koolee Khan, darogha of the stables of Khoosheal Khan, and high in the confidence of that chief.

The khan stepped forwards with a sort of tripping air of bustle and importance; besought us not to rise—not to move: made us a respectful salute, with a grin of self-complacence; and pouring forth a thousand disclamatory phrases, made a movement at seating himself, first quite near the bottom of the room, then, at our desire, a little higher; then, as if we had insisted upon it, and in perfect violence of his modest nature, he shuffled up nearly as high as ourselves. His behaviour betrayed the struggle that existed between his self-sufficiency and his desire to appear attentive to the duties of politeness. He fidgeted about upon his seat; ordered one servant one way, another, another; then told so many to range themselves in the room, and so many to stand without in the court: and not until he had puzzled the whole of his retinue with contradictory orders

did he find leisure to turn his undivided attention to the guests he had come expressly to visit.

Then, indeed, did the compliments fly thick. The health of both and each was duly canvassed and inquired for; the hopes that neither head nor body, spirits nor soul, felt incommoded, nor were the worse of our long journey;—that we found ourselves comfortable in our quarters, inchallah! and a hundred other equally sincere wishes were fervently expressed. Every conventional term of officious politeness, which the language of Iraun affords, and its customs authorise, was exhausted; and our visiter, long before he came to an end, had perfectly succeeded in persuading us of what he soon after informed us:—viz. that he was himself in reality a native of Iraun, although by the favour of destiny a servant of the khan of Boonere.

To all this courteous flummery of our countryman, what could we reply, but that however comfortable in bodily circumstances, or well in bodily health we might find ourselves, it was impossible that our minds could do otherwise than suffer under the assurance that in spite of all appearances, we, in fact, were his prisoners—victims of deceit and violated hospitality—illegally and dishonestly detained from proceeding upon our own important business.—“Punah-be-khodah!—what words!—well!—hear them then:

—what a story is this to tell!—no, no, no! never speak so!—La-illah-il-ullah! is this treatment for a prisoner?—is it thus that betrayers, violators of hospitality deal with their victims?—No, surely—you have mistaken.—But after all, of what do you complain?—Pray let your servant be intrusted—he has some influence, perhaps, and will be too happy to exert it in behalf of his countrymen.”

—“Then it is true that you are a Persian? we surmised so from the first; so much politeness belongs to no other land.”—“May your favour never diminish!—it is as you say; your servant is, inchallah! a Sheerauzee. At the time when Meer Mahmood Ghiljee led his fierce followers into the pleasant plains of Fars and Irak, I was seized and made prisoner, along with other youths, and sent away into the country of the conquerors. There my friendless state moved the compassion of an Eussuffzehee, a soldier of fortune, who carried me to his own village. My lucky star predominated, and I was seen by the mighty and generous Khoosheal Khan, who rescued me from obscurity, and taking the half-blighted bud which was withering in the wretched field of indigence, placed it in his own garden, and fostered it with the hand of beneficence, until, inchallah! it became a goodly tree.”—And the darogha, as he pronounced this morsel of rhetoric, stroked his black beard, smoothed his well-shaped mustachios,

looked at us with a placid smile before dropping his eyes modestly on the hilt of his dagger ; and then resuming a grave countenance, muttered over the fatheh, and ended with a deep “la-illa-il-ullah !”

“And pray,” pursued I, after throwing out a few vague observations in reply to this biographical sketch, “as the khan is our countryman, dare we be so bold as to ask him wherefore it is that we have been brought back by the servants of Khoosheal Khan to his own dominions, after that these same servants had by his own orders carried us in safety across the borders ; and to what end we are still detained here ?”

“I would state in your service,” replied the khan, with a full measure of importance in his air, “that nothing ever happens without a cause. Relate, if it be your pleasure, what it is that has happened to you : the cause may then become apparent : Lókman himself could otherwise say nothing.”

In the hour of danger or of doubt what is so welcome as good advice ? what is so encouraging as sympathy ?—To him who treads alone in a foreign and a hostile land, what is so delightful as the voice of a countryman ? Little as I felt disposed to confide in the professions or abilities of this person, there was something exhilarating in the very feeling that he was a countryman, and I was

easily induced to make him acquainted with what it could not hurt us for him to know ; I related to him, therefore, all that had occurred from the time of our entrance into the khan's country, including our reasons for taking so devious a route, up even to the present time.

He listened attentively, muttering only now and then a *la-illah-il-ullah ! aajeeb ! een che perfust ! barekilla !** or such like expressions. When I had concluded, he settled himself upon his seat, looked extremely solemn, and stroking his beard for some time as if communing deeply with himself, he at last gave utterance to his thoughts : “ Certainly the khan (blessings be upon him !) *must* have a reason for what he has done : every thing, as I said before, *must* have a reason—the business is to discover it. Doubtless the roads were dangerous, and he values your safety too highly to permit you to risk proceeding.”—“ I would fain wish,” said I, “ he had permitted us to judge for ourselves. Our business is urgent ; and as our wealth is small, so also must be our risk ; and surely we have a right to be masters of our own movements.”—“ Ah !” said he, “ I do not know ; the Affghauns would count it an indelible disgrace were one of their guests to come by any ill so near their borders. The khan, who is a

* Heavens ! wonderful !—what do you tell me ?—well done !
&c.

wise as well as a good man, would never suffer, as he could never survive an affront of such a nature : and, what can we tell ? he has many ways of coming at the truth, of which we have no conception. Depend upon it he has acted for the best. But pray," added he hastily, as if to change the subject, " have you heard nothing of the last exploit of your late master, the shah of Persia—Nadir Koolee, the son of the old skin-dealer that was ?"—" You will please to speak more reverently of Nadir Shah, even to a discarded servant," said I, interrupting his abusive flippancy ; " the steed may stumble, but it ill becomes the ass to jibe him ; the lion may die, but let the jackals beware of polluting even his carcass. But what has the king of Persia, the conqueror of Affghanistan as well as of India, thought it expedient to order or to execute in his march through these his realms ?"

" Why the king of kings, if you will have him so," returned the darogha, wondrous little abashed at my somewhat sharp reproof, " thought fit, it seems, to summon the chiefs of the Eussuffzehees to render him homage, and tribute in men, money, and provisions. They refused to acknowledge his sovereignty : he sent a force against them, which has been repulsed with great loss in the lower parts of this valley, and in Swaut :—probably it was a well-grounded alarm lest his

guests should fall into the hands of their enemies, as the Kuzzilbashes now must be deemed, that induced the khan to prevent their further progress even against their blind inclinations."

The look of mingled doubt and surprise, which was exchanged between Noor Mahomed and myself, did not escape the observation of our visiter.—"You disbelieve my report," said he; "but I can bring many witnesses to the truth of what I have said."—"We cannot need them," said Noor Mahomed, unable to contain himself; "the word of an Iraunee, who testifies with so much apparent regret to the defeat of his countrymen, surely can require no confirmation." A look from me restrained Noor Mahomed, and a smile of very equivocal meaning was the only reply of the darogha.

"But will you not offer me a calleeoon?" said the latter, immediately recovering his naturally familiar air;—"are the customs of Iraun to be forgotten among the mountains of the Eussuffzehees?"—"You do well," replied I, "to remind us of a courtesy which the kindness of our host has put it out of our power to offer. I have told you that we are prisoners, without baggage or property,—without even the clothes upon our bodies so soon as it shall please our captors to deprive us of them; but let us be no restraint upon you,—please send for your own calleeoon."

—“Touvah! touvah!* this is a fine way to take the matter indeed!—and do you really believe yourselves in the hands of robbers?—On my head be it, it is not so! Holla, there, peish-khidmuts!—who waits?—where are these gentlemen’s calleeoons?” And now we were informed that the whole of our baggage was safe and untouched in the outer apartment, waiting our orders; other calleeoons were instantly brought until our own could be prepared.

As soon as we had all smoked the customary number of ceremonious whiffs, the darogha, assuming a more friendly and familiar tone, as if he by this time considered himself quite entitled to our confidence, again addressed us:—“Well, friends, you were sharp upon me a moment ago for my foolish sally against your king, who, mashallah! is a great conqueror, and a very good shah; and good cause doubtless you have to say so, and to take his part;—but let that be. I swear by your heads, and by the life of the khan, that I meant no ill: no—shame upon my beard if I did;—and to you, by my life and soul, I only desire happiness and prosperity, and all good things. Alla beshnewed!—listen to me now: the khan—on whom be the blessings of Allah! for he is a worthy chief, a protector of the poor, a real help in need—the khan, I say, has, as you tell me, made you offers—great offers, to enter his

* A remonstratory exclamation—“nay! nay!”

service—is it not true?—It is true.—Well, then, in the name of God, O friends! why not accept them?—You have left one service, and are by your own accounts afloat on the surface of the world:—why not enter another? and such a service! la-illah-il-ullah!—you have no conception of it:—why, the khan will often perform ten times more than he promises: if he says he will give twenty ashurfees a month, who can tell if he will not make it forty, sixty, an hundred?—ay, and horses and kheluts to boot: ah! God knows his liberality!—then his words are so kind, and his heart is so good. Ah! he has a tongue like Lókman, and a heart and hand like Hatim Taeel*—Speak—say—answer me, friends,” continued he, finding we still kept silence; “by your heads I conjure you speak, and tell me what is in your thoughts!”

“Khan,” replied I very coolly, “we give you all due credit for the good-will which you have expressed for us; but as to acting upon the advice you have given, excuse us; we seek no service, and will accept none: we have been a very long time absent from home, and we would return to see whether our wives and children yet live. They mourn for us:—we would go to dry their tears:—why should you or the khan seek to prevent it?”

“Barekillah!” returned the darogha with a loud laugh—“dry your wives’ tears!—excellent!—

* A proverbially liberal and generous eastern worthy. †

as if soldiers' wives were ever at a loss to get that done!—why, comrades, what are you thinking of?—who can tell what may have become of your wives ere now? and what are the stupid moon-faced daughters of Iraun to the stately Affghauns, with their cheeks like roses, skins like alabaster, eyes like diamonds, and waists like the slender cypress-tree? And then, these houris of Kafferistan, who are brought here daily.—Staffer-ullah! a swoon of delight comes over me whenever I think on them!—oh! such divinities!—what are the Persian women to them? Pooch!* why a dozen of them won't be too much for each of your harems.”—And in this manner did the darogha run on, delighting himself so much, that he thought little of his auditors, until at length happening to glance at me, at the end of some of his periods, he saw something which he did not like, and stopped abruptly:—“What are all you rascals about?” resumed he, turning after a moment's pause to the servants: “be off!—out with you all!—leave only Allee Peish-khidmut. So now, friends, we are quite private, in the name of Allah and the Prophet, speak out your minds.”

“Khan,” replied I, in the same cold tone which I had all along maintained, “we have literally no more to say:—we seek nothing what-

* Dirt.

ever at the hands of Koosheal Khan, beyond that which he swore and pledged himself by his ancient custom to secure to us—freedom and safe conduct. Into his service we neither can nor will enter, be that service to lead us against Persia or not: we want neither high wages, nor horses, nor presents, nor your beauties of Kafferistan:—we only want to go about our business; and go we will, unless detained, as now we are, by force.”

“La-illah-il-ullah! what obstinate people!” exclaimed the poor khan, fumbling fast with his tusbee,* in a sort of perplexed vexation, which would have amused us had our minds been sufficiently at ease for mirth. But soon recovering, he came to the charge again, urging nearly a repetition of the same arguments, with little variety of terms, until I stopped him short by asking him, whether he had not been sent by the khan to try his skill in persuading his countrymen to comply with the chief’s terms.—“No, no!” exclaimed he, hastily, as if alarmed;—“no, by no means:” and he drew himself suddenly up: “what I said was all in pure friendship for you, my countrymen.—I have gone too far perhaps. I was wrong; but forgive me, and farewell!—unless, indeed,” added he, as if recollecting himself, “you will let me eat my *shaum*† with you. I do really wish you

* Rosary of beads.

† Evening meal; dinner.

very well, although you are so obstinate and so short with me : and I am a merry fellow : my talking will drive away your diltungee.* Come, what say you ?” And to say the truth, we had no objection ; for as we knew his drift, and there was no danger of his entrapping us into any scrape, his company, which, to do him justice, was amusing, and on the whole agreeable, might on the one hand beguile us of something of that heaviness which oppressed our spirits, while, on the other, we might possibly elicit some information worth having in the course of more unreserved conversation.

A very comfortable dinner was accordingly soon served up to us ; and when it was over, and the purdehs dropped all round, a bright fire of wood burning in the fire-place, and two large brass vessels filled with grease and stuck with lighted wicks, set down to give us light, the darogha with an affectation of mystery, but an internal chuckle, ordered his favourite peish-khidmut to bring in the “ dervish.” The man accordingly went out, and soon returned with a large bundle, from whence he produced two or three drinking cups of silver, and a large grey earthen vessel filled, as it proved, with very tolerable wine. This was an indulgence which, al-

* Low spirits : literally, constriction of the heart.

though we certainly did not expect, we were by no means disposed to reject.—“Behold!” said the darogha, “a dervish of the true stamp; a real refresher of the soul; a bestower of joy; a wise expounder of sage doctrines; an elevator of the senses into the seventh heaven.—This is the dervish with whom I love to consort—who is always a delightful companion: try, enjoy, converse with him, friends, and dismiss your cares.” And indeed the good darogha appeared fully disposed to make good the utmost of his words: so far from partaking in moderation like my brother and myself, Nuwaz Koolee, once cup in hand, seemed to forget every thing else. He drank, and spoke, and sung; rattled out extravagant praises of the khan his master, mingled with expressions of good-will toward ourselves, till at length the wine entirely conquered all his caution, and the truth began to ooze out along with the last glimmering of departing sense. Several of his half intelligible expressions were confirmative of our belief that he had visited us under the express orders of his master, to endeavour to inveigle us into his service; and there were others not a little at variance with that extreme love and respect which his more sober language expressed for this same admirable chief. At length, however, his favourite peish-khidmut, who seemed perfectly accustomed to his master’s failing, casting an expressive

look at us, interfered, and carried him off during a lame attempt which he was making at a contemptuous comparison between the service of that “clever, flattering rogue, Khoosheal, and the son of the skinner, Nadir Koolee,” as he termed the khan and shah respectively.

It was probable that Nuwaz Koolee Khan was too much ashamed of his failure and of his drunken exploits to show his face again; for he appeared no more: and several days passed on without any further visit or occurrence to mark the time. One night, however, the very favourite peish-khidmut of the darogha presented himself before us in a mysterious manner; and after carefully ascertaining that he could not be overheard, informed us that his master had entirely mistated the event of the shah’s attack upon the Eussuffzehees. “It has been,” said the peish-khidmut, “like all the shah’s undertakings, perfectly successful; he drove the whole force of the tribe before him; took and would have destroyed Joodara, but for the timely submission of Khoosheal Khan, who was forced to furnish supplies that have greatly crippled his means, and who consequently hates all Iraunees ten times worse than before. I, my lords, am a Persian, God help me! and fain would I quit this abominable country; but that is not an easy matter, as I fear you will find. But I do not, like *some* (and he spoke with emphasis), wish to

inveigle my countrymen into a service which, God forgive me ! is worse than that of the gins and deeves of Mazunderaun."

The peish-khidmut's intelligence was perhaps of little immediate consequence, for we were far enough beyond reach of our countrymen, even if their success would have availed us ; but they were pleasant to our feelings—to our pride,—and to our recollections of the past. On the other hand, it developed to us another link of the chain of deceit and perfidy by which we were hemmed in ; and while we reflected on all the mischief which this unhappy delay might be the cause of, it was no wonder that our spirits should sink at the prospect before us.

CHAPTER VII.

VICISSITUDES.

ANOTHER fortnight now passed on in painful tediousness, and we were neither visited by any person apparently in authority, nor could we elicit from those around us the smallest hint as to our future destiny ; most probably not one of them was in any degree acquainted with it. Our freedom was restricted to the round of our own court and of the two outer ones ; nor was any objection made to our mounting such parts of the walls as the precipice they overlooked rendered secure against escape ; but whenever we approached the gateway we were always respectfully but firmly repelled. Our own apartments were not in themselves unpleasant ; for they afforded from one of the windows an ample range of view down the valley into which the ravine above the castle poured its stream ; but little could we tell whither either of these led, or, had we been at liberty,

could we have known which way to bend our steps for escape.

One day, about three weeks after our arrival at the fortress, while gazing from the window of our prison, our ears were startled by the sound of a trumpet or horn; and looking down the valley, we could discern the glitter of spear-points and of armour among the underwood which clothed the roots of the hills. That men and horsemen were marching there I could perfectly distinguish, but they were too distant for my vision to make out their costume or colours; and presently they all disappeared behind a turn of the mountain-foot.

The excitement which such an incident could not fail to produce in both of us was increased by a bustle in the place, which assured us that some arrival of consequence had taken place; and that very night we received a visit from two persons whose appearance at least was sufficiently respectable. The one was an Affghaun, whose military dress and air announced him to be of high rank: the other was a moollah, of grave aspect and a long white beard, which doubtless betokened the presence of much learning and wisdom in the head which it adorned.

These personages, after a long and somewhat verbose preamble, in which they declared the high esteem which was borne to me by Khoosheal

Khan, and attempted by a specious sort of casuistry to excuse the outrage which had been inflicted upon us by his orders, went on to declare that, in consequence of this high estimation, he desired extremely to retain two such valuable persons in his service, and offered large emoluments and great encouragements if we should close with his proposals.

It is unnecessary to say that we rejected these in the most unequivocal manner, as we had done all other overtures of a like nature ; nor need I repeat the arguments they made use of to alter our decision, nor those with which we supported it. They left us at length, coldly observing that this our ultimate decision should be duly reported to Khoosheal Khan, and wished we might not in the end repent of our obstinacy. Ominous as this observation was, it made no impression on men who considered such a service and the detention which it involved the next worst thing to death itself ; and who, as we certainly did, entertained a full hope that firmness and steadiness in refusal would at length bring the matter to a favourable issue, by wringing from the khan an unwilling consent to our ultimate liberation :—we did not know the man with whom we had to deal.

That very night we were supplied with savoury food as usual, and, as sometimes also had happened, a vessel of wine was added to the repast, accompanied by a courteous message, informing

us that it was sent by a benevolent host to cheer the hearts of his guests. We drank without suspicion ; but the sin, if sin it were, met with speedy and severe punishment. We fell unconsciously into a deep sleep ; and when I awoke, it was in utter darkness, and parched with burning thirst. I cannot express the horror of my feelings. I thought at first that death was already past, and that having entered the regions of woe, I was experiencing the tortures of the damned ; for my bones were full of racking pains, and the sickness of death was upon me. I gazed about me—stretched my eye-balls till their strings almost cracked—but nothing could I see. Darkness—palpable darkness pressed upon me on every side ; nor did I dare to move for some minutes lest I might touch some horrid object, or plunge into some still deeper abyss. For my brain was confused by the sleeping potion, and visions of hell and of the grave were mingled with my awakening sensations. Thus writhing with both mental and bodily pain, for my thirst was excruciating, and the cold of my dungeon had filled me with cramps, I lay upon the damp floor motionless, except for the occasional shivering which shook me as with an ague fit. I found that most of my clothes had been torn off ; and that the only things left upon me were an Affghaun peerahun or shirt, with my drawers and a sort of under-vest of warm stuff,

which had probably escaped the notice of those who had carried me to the dungeon: these were but a miserable defence against the cold of a November night in such inclement regions.

How many hours were passed in this way I had no means of guessing. The first thing that roused me was observing a very faint line of light upon the wall, which gradually increasing, enabled me to discover that it proceeded from a door-way. The door was however fast. It was the entrance to my dungeon, of which I could now better comprehend the extent. It was a square cell, perhaps of five gez* each way, and in height less than three. More I could not detect by eyesight; but rousing up my faculties, with a strong effort I made the circuit of the walls, resolved to learn the worst and best of my condition.

The walls, cut as it seemed out of the solid rock, were cold and damp: the floor, probably of the same materials, seemed to have been levelled with clay, for some parts of it were soft and wet, and my feet slipped in them. I had not gone half round when my progress was arrested by an elevated object, over which I almost fell. Groping about with my hands, I discovered that it was a raised platform like a bench, formed either of rock or clay, the exact nature of which I could not discover; but on stretching still further abroad, my hands came in contact with a solid body, which

* Gez, a yard.

proved to be an earthen vessel of considerable size. Instinctively I lifted it: it was heavy, and the movement and splash of water was heard as it shook in my grasp. The burning thirst which was consuming my very vitals, and which had parched my tongue to utter dryness, was increased tenfold as it seemed at that sound, and I was hastily lifting the vessel to my lips, when a thought arrested my hands. Could this beverage have indeed been placed for me? Might it not rather be the leavings—the putrid disgusting leavings of some poor wretch—some former tenant of the place, who had perished in his loathsome dungeon, as I perhaps was doomed to do? or might it not be a poisoned liquid, set there on purpose, to finish the business which the sleeping draught had left undone? The victim of many treacheries becomes suspicious even against reason; but Reason soon resumed her ascendancy. Why, if my death was their object, should they have left its accomplishment to a second chance? Why not at once administer poison instead of a milder drug?—death instead of sleep. Why then suppose the water poisoned? And as for its purity, the urgency of thirst soon overcame all scruples; yet not without a shudder did I lift it again to my lips:—it was pure, sweet, cold water. Oh, how I drank! how delicious was it to my feverish lips!

Panting with the eagerness of my draft, I paused, and carefully set down the vessel: it was

evident that death by poison was not to be my portion, for the present, at least ; nor probably was starvation to be resorted to. The thought in some degree calmed me ; but the bewildering multitude of other considerations which soon rushed in upon me quickly disturbed that imperfect repose. What could their ultimate view be, in such conduct, but to force by any means into submission to their will, or in case of failure, to put me to death as a useless burden ? And I weighed closely the expediency of yielding a feigned consent, in order to obtain a greater degree of liberty ; but when I considered the jealousy with which so tardy an acquiescence would be viewed, and the length of time which must elapse before it would be possible to establish a confidence sufficient to permit of my project being carried into effect ; the chances of being ordered upon a duty which I would rather have died than perform, and being put to death as a traitor for refusal ; and the great probability of being discovered after all in any attempt to escape, combined with the extreme difficulty which must attend on all such attempts from my total ignorance of the country ; when I pondered all these considerations, I decided that it was better still to wait events and trust to the will of Providence, than to earn so slight a chance of safety by a sacrifice which would at all events be most

painful to an ingenuous mind: besides, though smarting under the misery with which I was surrounded, my mind was not yet utterly bowed down: on the contrary, it turned with indignation at the treacherous tyranny of which I had been made the victim, and became more firmly nerved with the spirit of resistance and manly courage, as the superior dignity of such conduct made itself more convincingly apparent.

The light which streamed from the crevice of my dungeon grew stronger, as the day advanced: probably too, my eyes by custom became more able to penetrate the darkness, for they wandered around the walls of my prison with less difficulty. But the contemplation brought no increase either of hope or comfort. A noise in the passage leading to the door was the first thing that awakened my attention, and a man entered, placed a coarse wooden dish with bread and a few crumbs of cheese upon the earthen mound, replenished my water-jug, all in utter silence, and then turning away, left me, in spite of all my efforts to draw from him a word. The day wore away, and night was approaching, when the same man entering once more, threw down a little straw, and a dark cummul, or coarse woollen blanket. I was grateful for this boon, which not only promised me a better night than the former, but served as an additional proof that death, at least imme-

diately, was not in contemplation; and as I wrapped the blanket around my still shivering body a ray of comfort entered into my soul.

This night again, while stretched upon my scanty couch of straw, was I visited by one of those visions which Providence, as I believe, often sends in its benevolent care to comfort or to warn its creatures, at times when without such aid they might sink under the burden of their misfortunes. The same solemn voice which had so lately warned me of my danger, now whispered in my ear the words of encouragement and confidence; exhorted me to firmness, to courage, and endurance; and so powerfully was the tendency of this dream impressed upon my mind, that most assuredly to its influence did I owe the strength which was so necessary to support me in the trial which was approaching.

On the following day the very same officer who had visited us on the evening of our removal to the dungeon, entered, attended as before by the white-bearded moollah, who acted as his secretary, noting down the replies which I made to his various questions. He now again appealed to me, as having had experience of the khan's displeasure as well as of his munificent kindness; and demanded to know whether I had yet reconsidered the offers formerly made to me, and was inclined to alter the determination I had then signified.

To this appeal I replied, "That the resolution which mild and reasonable persuasion had failed to shake should never be overthrown by tyrannical cruelty; that my body was indeed in his master's power; but to render that body useful, unless by my own consent, was beyond his utmost strength or skill; that my resolution never to be the servant of Khoosheal Khan remained more firm than ever."

"Had I considered," he inquired, "that it lay with the khan to confine me in that very dungeon until disease should rot me?—to starve or torture me to death?"—"I have considered," replied I, "every thing that you can do to this body, which, if not free, is as worthless to myself as it shall be to Khoosheal Khan. I know too, that to die is always in my own power: the khan can hasten that death, but he cannot make me live."—But it is unnecessary to enumerate all the variety of threats and of defiance which were exchanged between us: long, long did the interview continue, and tedious was the eternal repetition of stale arguments. My visiter, to do him justice, was faithful to his task, and just in pointing out to me the fatal consequences of persisting in my obstinacy; but I was firm, and his patience at last failed. "Enter, then!" exclaimed he in a voice of thunder to the guards, who had it seems been posted at the door:—"enter, and give this obsti-

nate ass a specimen of what he has braved and must endure!" and in an instant three or four fellows rushing in, laid hold of me, and binding my limbs, laid upon me with their sticks and clubs until I became nearly senseless on the spot. When they judged I had enough for the time, the whole party withdrew, leaving me to recover, as best I might, at leisure.

Why should I dwell upon the continuance of my sufferings?—My body was sorely wounded; my mind became gradually diseased—broken down. Had my persecutors come with their proposals upon any of the few following days, I will not venture to say what might have been my reply; for when the body has been enervated by sufferings, the mind sympathises in its weakness; and if at such a moment protracted misery be placed on the one hand, and ease, with comparative enjoyment on the other, we may pity, but scarcely can condemn a choice, which, under other circumstances, might have been more worthy.

But Providence, who knows what its creatures are fitted to endure, spared me this painful struggle. Day after day passed on, and neither visiter nor executioner appeared:—food, coarse, but not unwholesome, was regularly supplied me. My bruises healed by degrees; but my mind was embittered,—reckless, and my heart almost broken by protracted anxiety and disappointed hope.

I thought of Iraun—of my poor forlorn Shireen—of my family—of my affectionate fellow-sufferer and brother, Noor Mahomed—of all the brilliant days of my past life, until my brain was bewildered; and they all seemed remote visions, unsubstantial dreams, which never could have had existence except in the wretched prisoner's imagination. My brain had, indeed, become fearfully weak; so much so, as to confound recollections and sensations in the most unaccountable manner: even the remembrance of the past and the anticipations of the future became wildly mingled together; and surely had my confinement under such depressing circumstances continued much longer, the scene would have closed entirely.

Such, however, was not the will of Heaven. After three months' imprisonment in this dungeon, as they told me afterwards, the same gaoler who had brought my daily food, and who, though perseveringly silent, and uniformly disregarding my questions, had never been otherwise harsh or cruel, entered one day abruptly, and ordered me to rise and follow him. The words were said in the Pushtoo tongue, which I did not understand; but instinctively comprehending his meaning, I rose with bewildered haste to obey him. I rushed to the yielding door; but scarce had I got beyond it, when the fresher air and increase of light, even in the passage itself, overpowered me so much,

that I fell half fainting on the ground. The man seemed touched with compassion : he lifted me up, and seating me upon a mat in his own room, procured me a little sherbet, which refreshed me ; and in a few minutes I was able to rise again and walk, although my eyes were still so weak, that for a long time I could not distinguish objects in the light.

Passing onward, scarcely knowing whither they led me, we came, as I could just perceive, into the court of the castle next to the gateway ; and while groping about, and trying gradually to use my eyes a little, I felt myself suddenly embraced by some one. The voice, hollow and sepulchral as it was, more than either eyesight or feeling, told me that it was my brother, Noor Mahomed ; for it was a skeleton that I clasped in my arms. The sudden shock, painful though it was, did good ; for my feelings were instantly excited, and I wept like a child in his arms.

I believe that the spectacle of our meeting affected some among the by-standers, who till then had carelessly beheld our wretched plight ; for some trifling indulgences were now tendered to us, and more than one person came forward with offers of food and raiment : some of these were women, and I could distinguish many expressions of commiseration and kindness from individuals of that sex, the voice of which never failed to fill me with delightful emotions.

At length I comprehended that Noor Mahomed and myself, along with some other Persian captives, were to be sent to a certain district, to work as labourers upon estates belonging to the khan. Even this was a state of bliss compared with remaining the tenant of that noisome dungeon which I had so long inhabited, although to what happy chance we owed the boon remained to us unknown; and when I declare that at this moment the doom which I should but three months before have considered as nearly equivalent to death, appeared to me a blessed relief from that which I had lately suffered under, it proves how very indefinite and comparative are the feelings as well as the terms of human happiness or misery. As to Noor Mahomed, he, poor fellow, had kept pace with me in suffering; and the effect upon his external appearance was equally remarkable, although his health had suffered less deeply than mine. Both were haggard, shrunk skeletons; pale, ghost-like shadows of what we had been: our very mothers, had they lived, would not have recognised their sons.

I will not dwell in detail upon what followed. By slow journeys, and by the help of animals to carry those who were unable to walk, we were conveyed still higher up the valley, and yet nearer the loftier ranges of mountains, to villages, among which we were distributed and placed at agricul-

tural labour. Noor Mahomed and I, being known to be related, were humanely suffered to continue together: indeed all undue severity ceased to be exercised. We were forced, like others, to work at certain tasks; but were neither ill-used nor ill-fed. We were slaves in fact, but considered much in the same light as the poorer ryots, termed “fakeers” by the Eussuffzehees; a class of peasantry who in this country perform the laborious works of the field, while their proud masters choose only to fight, and live upon the produce raised by these menials. Our health and strength improved fast by the wholesome air and exercise of the country; and all we had to lament was our protracted separation from every thing we had on earth to love, and the hopelessness of ever rejoining them. But the Almighty, who, at the birth of mortals, writes upon their foreheads the events of their future life, and who in his own good time works out his own designs, had decreed for us better things, and brought them to pass by means of a very unlooked-for agent.

The chief of Deereh in the valley of Punjecorah, who was recognised as head of the Accozehee tribe, had an hereditary feud with Khoosheal Khan. He had besides conducted himself as a loyal subject towards the deputies sent him by Nadir, and was therefore upon friendly terms with Persia. This Timour Khan, increasing in

strength and power, had made a vow to invade Boonere, and to revenge himself for former aggressions and murders, upon his enemy, now weakened by his unsuccessful struggle with the Persian monarch.

Accordingly, mustering his forces, he made a rapid inroad ; crossed the Swaut, and entering Boonere by the remote district where we were stationed, cut the Eussuffzehees who were there to pieces. The slaves, however, and the fakeers who made no resistance, were not hurt : on the contrary, the khan having learned that there were Persian captives among those who had submitted, ordered us all to be called before him, and signified that such of us as chose to enter his service should have employment ; but that all who desired to return to their own country should be supplied with the means of doing so.

It would be vain to describe the delight of my brother and myself, as well as of the other Persian captives at this unexpected turn of affairs, nor the joy with which we accepted the proffered boon. All difficulty seemed now at an end : the magic spell which had bound us so long was broken. Timour Khan supplied us each with decent clothes and a small sum of money, and sent us under a strong escort as far as Jelallabad. Unwilling to risk encountering the inconveniences which might have attended our being known as officers, neither

Noor Mahomed nor myself chose to claim any other rank than that of soldiers, taken prisoners by the Boonere Eussuffzehees; the supply of money which we received was therefore correspondingly small: a trifle had likewise escaped the search of our jailers, in consequence of the precautions we had taken. These resources enabled us to pay our way with caravans, the only safe mode of travelling, as far as Furrah, where our means were so nearly expended that we were forced to agree with a surly sarwan to carry us to Mushed upon condition of our little baggage being made over to him as security for the balance of hire to be paid him at that place.

At length we departed from Furrah; and at every fresh munzil which we reached our hearts beat with more anxious alarm, as we anticipated the tidings we might receive of those from whom we had been separated for so many tedious years. Even in the full year and half which had elapsed from the time we had been abandoned by the army of our former master, at Rawil Pundee, what might—what *must* those objects of our fondest affection have endured, when that army reached their native land without a word of cheering intelligence from their husbands—their fathers! What might not the family of a disgraced favourite have suffered from the rude and unprincipled menials of a minister or prince? My blood ran cold

within me at the thought : the speed of the falcon or the dove would have seemed slow to bear me to the place where all this anxiety was to be terminated : what then must have been our sufferings while enduring the snail-like pace of a caravan !

CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPOINTMENTS.

THERE are some epochs and events in the life of man which mock the lapse of years, and in spite of the storms and whirlwinds which sweep over the memory, live in it ever fresh and unchanged. Were my life to endure for ages I never could forget the morning on which, returning from my long captivity, I came in sight of the venerable city of Mushed ; and still less, the fearful day which succeeded that anxious, feverish morning.

For many days before it sleep had fled from my eyelids ; and mere cessation from actual bodily exertion was the only refreshment which I obtained at our daily halting places. Indeed even this rest was a weariness in its kind ; for the eager desire of getting forward rendered the necessary halts themselves vexatious. Had we possessed the means of pressing onward, no fear of danger should have prevented us from shortening the

distance between us and our homes, by journeying day and night : but this without horses or animals of any description was impossible, and we were most unwillingly forced to abide the movements of the caravan to which we belonged. Upon our arrival at Sungbust, however, six fursungs, or about twenty-four miles only, from Mushed, we could no longer endure the delay ; and instead of remaining with the rest for the few customary hours of repose, fatigued as we were by the day's march, Noor Mahomed and myself, leaving our trifling baggage in the hands of our churwadar,* pushed onwards ; and walking by the light of a brilliant moon, reached, a little before sunrise, the top of an acclivity or gorge, from whence the whole long plain opened up before us, with Mushed itself about ten miles distant, looming indistinctly through the grey haze of morning. " At last— at last it is there !" exclaimed Noor Mahomed, " Alhumdulillah !—alhumdulillah !—thanks be to the Most High !—may the blessings of the Almighty rest on its holy domes and shrines ! and, oh ! may poor pilgrims like us find our homes and all they contain preserved to them in peace and security as our prayers would have them !"—" Inshallah ! inshallah !" echoed I, my eyes half blinded with tears, and the sobs of mingled ap-

* Muleteer.

prehension and delight precluding any further utterance at the moment.

While we descended the eminence, the rich glow of the eastern sky gave place to a more powerful light; and at length the sun himself arose like a globe of ruddy fire, from the deep empurpled haze which skirted all the horizon, and sent streams of brilliant light across the pure azure that lay spread above us, unflecked by a single cloud. "See," said Noor Mahomed, "how the holy minarets and domes glow like fiery points in these level beams!"—"Ay, and may their glory ever increase!" said I, ejaculating the *Fathehah*, as a devout and tender emotion arose within me at the sight of objects which recalled to me so many seasons of both joy and woe. "But what may yon be," continued I, "which rises to intercept our view?" and as I spoke a dim ruddy vapour ascended, shrouding the city from our sight, and hovering like a cloud above it. And still the filmy veil rose and rose, obscuring the whole horizon, until the sun itself was hid from us, and the distant plain grew dark and indistinct. "It is the dust," said Noor Mahomed: "this is the hour when both men and cattle move out to their labour, and they have set the dust in motion; or it may be the vapours of last evening's dew, only now rising under the in-

fluence of the sun :—the occurrence is a common one.”—“ It may be so,” said I, “ but it has a singular effect, and impresses me painfully. God grant that we find all right in that city !—And see—see these birds :—they are ravens surely :—see how they cross our path ;—there, in the distance.—Little do I heed such things in general, and yet my mind misgives me now.”—“ Look ! look !” interrupted Noor Mahomed, “ what has come over the city ? By heavens ! it is taking flight altogether from the earth.” And in reality the city did appear gradually to rise from the lower line of vapour, far above the level of the plain, until domes, gates, minarets, and other buildings had attained an incredible distinctness in relief against the sky. We watched them thus starting marvellously into being upon their airy foundation for several minutes, when a dark uncertain vision, like a cloud, at length was seen fluttering over the fair fabric. For a while it hovered over it with changeful play ; then shot down many lines which joined the loftiest points : others followed in thick succession, until the once clearly defined edifices of the city became blended in confused and wavering bands uniting the two streaks of vapour. These bands speedily became more solid : they joined, quivered with an uncertain tremour for a while ; and then the whole pageant dissolved,

and was absorbed in the dark sea of mist.*
“La-illah-il-ullah!” exclaimed Noor Mahomed,
“what prodigy is this! saw ever any one such a
marvel?”—“May God send it be a fortunate
one!” said I: “hope has revived in my heart; for
the termination of the omen is better than its
beginning. And yet the whole may be but an
appearance natural to the hour and place:—many
of the same description have I seen; but none I
confess so distinct, so wonderful, so speaking as
this. Almighty God grant a happy issue to true
believers!”—“Inshallah! let us continue our
course,” said my brother; and we held on our
way with fresh energy.

In due time the vapours dissipated, and the
city rose upon our sight, with all its surrounding
gardens, villages and sacred shrines, the same as
in happier days. But fear and anxiety increased
upon me as we approached; my heart beat thick,
and my knees trembled, and a cold sweat stood on
my forehead in spite of the burning sun, which
now rose high in heaven. More than once I was
forced to stop and recover myself before we

* Those who may have witnessed the wonderful phenomena produced by powerful refraction, or the “mirage,” on extensive dusty plains heated during the day, and cooled during the night, by the alterations of temperature at these seasons, will have no difficulty in accounting for what perplexed the travellers.—*Translator's note.*

reached the gate; for, exhausted as I had been with fatigue and misery, the emotions within me were too powerful for my frame. For Shireen—I scarce dared to let my thoughts approach the name—wife, and little ones, and home, floated in misty speculation before my eyes; but I had no courage to rush on and raise the veil which might destroy hope and happiness at once.

At length we entered the gateway which opens upon the chief street of Mushed. But as we passed along the banks of its canal, now cleared and beautified by the munificence of our former master, I scarcely ventured to raise my eyes, lest they should fall upon some object of evil omen, or recognise some one who might greet me with ill tidings. How then shall I describe what I felt when we turned into the very lane in which my house had been situated? the beatings of my heart were audible; and as the well-known little entrance came in view, a mist seemed to rise before my eyes, and shut out every object. O God! is it not true that our minds can sometimes look dimly into futurity? that the force of evil bodings endues them with a prophetic power, which overleaps the present and gazes upon misfortune yet to come? I knew it—the moment I came in sight of the place I could have sworn it—that all was lost; that home, and wife, and family, all were

gone ; and that I was a miserable wretch, with nothing left upon earth to love or care for !

Even when the reply was given to Noor Mahomed, who inquired “ who lived there ?” for *I* could not do it—and when they named the name of a stranger, so strong had been my previous conviction that my family were there no longer that my emotion was scarcely increased by this confirmation of my calamity. I reeled indeed, and half fell upon a raised seat of earth near the doorway ; so evidently overcome, that the person who had answered the inquiry took notice of it, and offered assistance ; but it was more from the effect of previous agitation than of the last effectual blow.

The heart of Noor Mahomed, although lighter than mine, as his frame was less shattered, sunk at this reply : but it occurred to him, as he afterwards informed me, that our wives might not improbably have changed their dwelling ; and with the view of eliciting something that might lead to such a discovery, he proceeded with his questions. “ How long had the present possessor of the house occupied it ?” The servant believed nearly two years. “ And who had been his predecessor ?” The man knew not ; he was a stranger, lately entered on his present service. “ Could we see his master ?”—“ No ; he was not then at home.”

But at this moment the nerveless state of de-

spair into which I had fallen experienced a frenzied re-action. Starting from the seat, I darted through the open door-way, swearing that my wife was within, and that see her, and speak with, and rescue her I would. And when the servant, aghast at my violence, ran forward to oppose my progress, I threw him to the earth with the force of a mad man, and rushed towards the entrance leading to the private apartments. Noor Mahomed, however, recovering from his surprise, ran up and retained me forcibly, until his earnest remonstrances induced me to pause ; and then, assisted by the servant, he made me once more sit down, while, in order to account for my outrageous conduct, he shortly mentioned that in this house some years before I had left my wife and family.

The man, touched by the appeal, and by my evident distress, was endeavouring to soothe me with some common-place observations, when an old woman, attracted probably by the noise, made her appearance from the inner rooms. “ Ah ! Mahboubeh,” said he, “ in good time you come : perhaps you can tell these gentlemen something about the persons who lived here before our master came ?”—“ What say you ?” said she : “ how should I know any thing of them ?—All I know is, that the house had been half destroyed,—by the shah’s order it was said : we did not come until it had been quite refitted.” A fresh ague fit came

over me at these words: nor was Noor Mahomed now in a much better condition; for they seemed to carry with them a dismal confirmation of our very worst apprehensions. The servant felt for us. "Pshah! Mahboubah," said he, "that may be a mistake; besides, who can tell if the thing happened while the house was occupied by this gentleman's family?—is there no one who could tell?"—"Ah!" sighed the old woman at this reference to our interest in the affair:—"is it then so?—Poor man!—but stay:—doubtless old Humza Dullauk, who lives at the end of the lane, may know something of the matter."—"True! true!" exclaimed Noor Mahomed, "old Humza is just the man. Ismael, let us quit this unlucky place, and seek information from the old man."

The least glimmering of hope is sufficient to rouse the despairing; and to the old barber's shop we went. He occupied the same wretched hovel as when I had left the place; but had shrunk, through age and poverty, into a mere shadow. His senses, however, were sufficiently acute, and his recollection exact enough to drive me utterly to despair. "Is it of that house you would ask me?" responded the aged creature. "Ah! agas, well do I know it and its master Allee Mouraud Thajir, and every tenant it has had for the last thirty years."—"Well, well; but we only want to hear about the last—those who lived there im-

mediately before the present ones—you understand?”—“ Ah ! it is of them you would know ? Ah ! poor things !—yes, they were unfortunate creatures !—they were women, agas—poor unprotected women !—the family of a brave gentleman too—a gallant soldier ;—ay, and a khan ! He was a great favourite with the shah—may God preserve us !—and went with him when all our brave youths went to Kandahar : ay, and further too—to Hindostan they say :—but what does old Humza know of such places ?—He brought back mountains of gold, they say, and camel-loads of diamonds.”—“ What ! the khan ?”—“ No, no, the shah I was speaking of : they say he does not leave much wealth with other people.”—“ Well, but the khan ?—it is of him we want to know.—His name—what was it ?”—“ Ah ! his name—well did I know him, poor young man ! many a time have I shaved his head, and cracked his joints when I was dullauk at the Vizeeree Hummaum : he was a wild one in these days, God forgive us all !—but—”—“ In the name of God,” cried I, loosing all patience at the old man’s garrulity, and speaking out for the first time in my natural voice—“ in the name of Heaven, O man ! tell us his name, and be done.”—“ Allah-il-ullah !” exclaimed the old barber, starting back as if he had been shot, “ what sound is that ?—it is the voice of the khan himself !”—“ It was Ismael, then,” said I in-

quiringly. — “ Khodah Buzoorg ! it was, to be sure—it is—it is he ! O khan ! are you alive or dead ?—it is a shame to frighten an old man in this fashion.” — “ Peace, old man—I am well, and no harm shall happen to you : only tell me of my family ;—tell me what has befallen them ?” — “ O, Mahomed !—then you don’t know ?” — “ I know nothing, man, but that I shall go distracted if you keep me much longer in this suspense. What, I say, in Heaven’s name, did happen to them ?”

“ La-illa-il-ullah ! how I do pity you !” still muttered the old man ; “ they are gone ! Allah only knows where.” — “ How gone ?” — “ Yes, when the house was pillaged.” — “ Pillaged !” said Noor Mahomed,—for I trembled with fear and impatience too much to speak. “ Say, how did that happen ?” — “ Why,” replied the old barber, “ when Prince Reza Koolee Meerza was living here, and fresh reports were daily coming from the shah’s army,—no doubt of what was going on there,—many a house in Mushed, and many a village in the country was pillaged and destroyed by his orders. So, one day up came a number of furoshes, led by a nassakchee and his men from the palace, and came to the lane yonder. What can this be about ? thought I, and I closed my little shop for fear ; but down they went to the khan’s house yonder, where all his family dwelt, peaceably enough, poor souls !—bang went the

doors, and in went they: and there were cries and shrieks, and a great crowd collected; and I would fain have gone among them to see what was doing, though for that matter it was easy to guess it. But ah, agas! the fellick* is a cruel thing, and a nassakchee's knife makes short work with a nose or an ear, and so I staid quietly here; and the hubbub went on, and the house was clean pillaged, and the whole party went off, leaving neither man, woman, nor child; no, nor a thing living nor dead within its walls. Carpets, numuds, vessels of brass and vessels of china, clothes, purdehs, furnishings, all were gone; not a rag nor a shred was left, and the house itself was half pulled down. They would have pulled it down altogether, but that old Allee Mouraud came shuffling up in a great hurry to tell the furoshes that the house was not the khan's but his. 'Get off with you, ye old unblessed dog!' said they, 'or your house shall be your grave.'—But he knew another language which they understood well; and so off they went, leaving that part of their work only half done."

"And the unhappy women?" asked Noor Mahomed, in a voice of subdued agony, "was it never known what became of them?"—"No, aga, I believe not: *I* at least know nothing; but what

* The noose used to secure the feet of persons undergoing the bastinado.

could have become of them in the hands of these brutal furoshes?" said the old man with a half shrug, half shudder. The thought was too much for me: with a loud shriek I fell senseless on the floor, and recovered only to the delirium of a raging fever.

Well was it for me that the old dullauk, taking for granted, probably from my furious movements and burning skin, that my disease was of a *hot* nature, immediately got my arm and foot held, and took some blood from each; and better still I have since seen reason to believe it was, that the bandages being torn off by the violence of my feverish efforts, the wounds bled three times as much as the old man intended, to his great alarm: the wholesome discharge probably saved my life. Poor Noor Mahomed! himself a prey to the most racking despair,—for doubt was now at an end,—hung over and nursed me like a brother, as he ever has been to me; and perhaps it was fortunate for his health of mind and body that he had so imperative a demand upon the exertions of both: it left him less leisure to brood over his own misfortunes.

Seven long days elapsed before, weak and miserably reduced, I regained my senses; and, to the delight of my affectionate brother, and the great relief of the old barber, in whose hovel I had necessarily remained during my illness, began

to talk rationally. But it was not for some time after that the full sense of our misfortunes broke gradually upon me ; and even then, although its force was sufficiently overwhelming, the weakened state of my body prevented its effect from bearing so heavily upon the mind as at first. Noor Mahomed, too, in his communications, endeavoured to inspire me with a hope, which he felt not himself, that the worst to be apprehended might not have occurred, and that as there was no evidence to prove that our poor wives had been murdered or otherwise destroyed, they must surely be still in existence, and might possibly have escaped free of gross outrage in the wreck of their affairs.

The wretched will grasp at shadows for relief ; and I, by thinking, talking, and reasoning upon the subject, at length became half persuaded that we had too suddenly given way to despondency ; that those we mourned as lost must have been in some manner preserved, and would at last be restored to us : and such an effect did this wild, this almost insane idea produce upon my health and spirits, that I began rapidly to recover, and every day increased in hope, and grew stronger in the resolution of commencing a vigorous search after our missing families.

But no such hope sustained my brother-in-law. Despair seemed to fly from me only to seize upon him : as I regained my strength, so did he lose

his. His hollow cheeks and sunken eye declared ere long the rapid inroads which grief and disappointment were making on his health, and at length his appearance became so alarmingly bad, that I began seriously to tremble for his life ; to fear, that whatever might be the fate of our wives, one at least of them would soon be a widow.

But other trials awaited us. Poverty and want, with their terrific consequences, were fast closing in upon us ; and strange to think, in the city of my native province—the place which in better days had been the scene of happiness and of plenty—my loved familiar home, I could now see no resource against absolute destitution. Cut off by our misfortunes from the supplies we hoped to have found here, we had been forced to discharge our debt to the muleteer from Furrah by making over to him the trifling baggage we possessed, so that nothing remained to us except the clothes upon our backs, and two pieces of gold which I had fortunately been able to preserve in all our wanderings. Of these, one had been given to the old dullauk, for necessaries required during my illness : the other, after paying a few trifling debts incurred for the coarsest food, left scarcely any residue. A few days must see us deprived of bread : how, under such circumstances, could we hope to commence any efficient search for the objects of our anxiety ? how could it even be pos-

sible to support my poor declining brother, who now stood doubly in need of those comforts which I had no means of procuring him ?

Necessity makes men bold. I did possess resources in Mushed ; but to attempt availing myself of them might prove not only very difficult, but extremely dangerous. But when now it became a question of life or death, of comfort or starvation, it surely was a more manly as well as a more politic course to meet our fate in a bold struggle for safety, than to await it by the slow approaches of famine in our lairs. In addition to the property which I had left in the hands of my wife, with the forecast so requisite in times of trouble, I had secreted several sums of money and valuables in places known only to Shireen and myself. Some hundreds of tomanauns in gold were buried in a private spot of the court in the house she lived in : another considerable sum was in the same manner committed to the earth in my residence at Futehabad. Besides these, I had lent sums of money to two or three persons in the Mushed bazar, merchants of fair character and sufficient substance ; and had deposited with them arms and jewels of some value, for sale on my account ; and the acknowledgements of all these sums and goods had been left by me in the hands of my wife when I was quitting Mushed to follow the army.

Thus there was property sufficient for all our wants within the city walls, provided only we could fall upon the means of claiming it with effect:—but to do this was the very difficulty, for well I knew that to claim a debt, unsupported by either witness, acknowledgement, or interest of any description to back my application, would be utterly useless, and might be dangerous.

It was now that we were more than ever sensible of the baleful effect which in our peculiar case followed the loss of royal favour. Orphans as both of us were—brothers in misfortune, without family or friends of blood, we stood alone and unsupported in the world, save by the gracious light of that auspicious countenance which now was clouded to us for ever. What was our intrinsic worth or merits in the eyes of those friends who courted our regards or honoured us with their attention, but while we shone bright in the beams of that royal favour in which they themselves basked, or which they sought to enjoy? When the cloud came, and that sun shone on us no more, they withdrew; they renounced us: the gay, happy insects which fluttered in the full ray regarded not the wounded worms that crawled darkly upon the earth; they were left to pine, or die unnoticed and alone.

Much as I had lived in Mushed, and well as I had once been known there, there was not, so far

as I could tell, within its walls a single individual on whom my brother or myself had any claim ; not one to whom we might look for an act of kindness beyond the exercise of common charity. On the contrary, denounced as we were by royal authority, what could we look for but to be shunned like infected creatures who carried with them a pestilential atmosphere ? The only friends from whom I might have hoped assistance were all far away with the army ; and even had they been at hand, was it to be expected that they would brave the wrath of their king to help a ruined favourite ?—No !—neither friendship, hospitality, nor charity, not even common justice was to be looked for by excommunicated wretches like us. And such, in truth, proved to be the case. Except the poor old dullauk, whose hovel still perforce yielded us shelter, not one of those who had been our acquaintances would deign to acknowledge us : or if they did, their coldness of regard would have driven us off, even before they turned their faces from us. Some greeted us with harsh upbraidings for our supposed imprudences ; and a few honestly declared that they could not risk encountering the wrath of a gloomy tyrant by any renewal of intercourse with his disgraced servant.

Thus situated, what hope could I reasonably entertain of recovering the property I had lent,

unprovided as I was with any acknowledgment of the debt? Yet to attempt it was our only chance for obtaining the means of supporting existence, and what was still more in our thoughts, of searching for our lost families: so to make the attempt I resolved.

Although I foresaw greater difficulties in any operations within the city than were to be apprehended in my search at Futehabad, I thought, considering the distance of that place and the urgency of our affairs, that it was best to commence with the former. So soon, therefore, as I was able to walk abroad, I presented myself at the outaugh* of the merchant to whom I had lent the largest sum of money. The man contented himself with coldly denying all knowledge of the transaction or of my person: he warned me of the danger which impostors incurred; cautioned me against impugning his fair credit by groundless and defamatory reports; and finally, challenged me to meet him, if I had a mind, before the cauzee, with proofs and his acknowledgment of the debt, without which latter document he protested that he never entered into any transactions of such a description.

Mortified, but not discouraged, I applied to another of my debtors, who assumed a tone altogether

* Shop, chamber of business.

different. Beckoning me into an inner room, he addressed me with the most impudent air imaginable :—" You call yourself Ismael Khan of Karaboulagh," said he ; " and it may or may not be the case ; for, although you are a sad-looking vagabond, there is, I confess, something in your features which resembles the man you speak of. Neither do I deny that certain money transactions did take place between me and the khan ; but whatsoever may have been their nature, I certainly shall not dream of accounting for them with you. For either you are an impostor, and have no just claim to urge, or you are an outlawed man whose property has all been confiscated to the crown. When called upon by the shah, then, I shall know what reply to make. Get thee gone, therefore—be off ; or I may find means to summon certain furoshes from the palace, who will know better than I do how to deal with thee !"

Confounded at the man's insolence and villany, I remained speechless for a moment.—" Shameless scoundrel !" at last I began ; but reflecting that I had no power to enforce either threats or abuse ; and that, doubtless, I might fall into a scrape worse than the loss of my money, I stopped short in my abusive address.—" It is well," continued I ; " my time, however, may come :—to-day for you, to-morrow for me ; and then, tremble ! for your account will be severe."—" Good,"

replied he, grinning maliciously ; “ and when your day *does* come, my account shall be ready.” I left the house, not trusting myself with another word, but muttering bitter curses upon the heartless knave.

I next called upon a grave personage, of good report as an honest dealer, and a well-disposed charitable man. To him I had intrusted several valuables for sale, as also no inconsiderable sum in money ; for all which I had received his written acknowledgment. My appearance must undoubtedly have undergone a very considerable change, for Hadjee Abdool Kauder, such was the merchant’s name, looked long and earnestly at me before he could satisfy himself of my identity : when he had done so, however, he did not refuse a few kind expressions of condolence on my misfortunes, and of his regret at being unable to afford any substantial relief to one whom he had certainly esteemed. As to the goods and money which he had received of me, for these, as he could prove, he had faithfully accounted to the holder of the acknowledgment which had been given by him upon the receipt. And, unlocking the iron-clasped trunk which lay before him, he drew forth from it a bundle of papers put up with true mercantile precision ; and after searching for a few moments, he handed me one, which I instantly recognised as the very receipt of Hadjee

Abdool Kauder, for the goods in question, marked with my own hand, and which I had left with other papers in the hands of my poor Shireen.

“And whence, in God’s name, O hadjee ! had you this ?” inquired I earnestly.—“Nay,” replied he, “that you should surely best know, for you must know to whom you gave it. It was brought to me by a respectable-looking servant, who said he had been sent to receive the money, and such goods as might remain unsold. Of course I gave them up ; and look ! you will see here the name of the lady who sent it, and she calls herself your wife.”—“Great God ! let me see,” said I ; and truly in one corner I read the discharge of *Shireen, the wife of Ismael Khan*, to Hadjee Abdool Kauder ; and saw the impression of a small signet, which also had been left in her hands. Here was proof enough that Shireen had received the deposit. I questioned the merchant over and over again respecting the particulars of the transaction ; but he had no further information to give, and I turned to depart, agitated and excited, but on the whole more elated than reason might have warranted at this token of her existence. The good hadjee was not insensible to my emotion ; and guessing, no doubt, from my appearance, that my circumstances were not too flourishing, he told me, that God had prospered his industry since we last had met, and that if a

small sum of money would be of service to me, he would willingly place it at my disposal; although, under all circumstances, I must see that it would be better for both that we should not often meet. Spite of this cautious qualification, I was not insensible to a kindness, which was the more precious, because so rare; but I could not, as yet at least, bring myself to accept of charity from any man; and thus we parted.

It now remained for me to attempt recovering the money buried in my former dwelling; an enterprise which it puzzled us to set about in any promising way. Standing as I did beyond the protection of the law, I had nothing to trust to in my dealings with men except such natural sense of honour and integrity as those individuals might possess with whom it was my fate to be connected in business; and, alas! I had already found this to be a slender reed to lean upon. My house belonged to Allee Mouraud Thajir, who, as landlord, might insist upon the privilege of searching within his own premises for any legitimate purpose: but I was too well acquainted with his grasping character to risk a discovery to him; for not one tomaun would he ever have given up, and the smallest hint of buried treasure would never have been lost sight of by him until he should have ferreted out the deposit.

Of the present tenant I knew nothing; but to

throw myself upon the honour of a stranger appeared altogether too wildly hazardous. An application to the cauzee, who possessed the power of insisting upon a search, was another expedient which suggested itself; but how often are such officers mercenary or grasping : and in case of his seeing fit to seize the whole sum, in the king's name, and applying it afterwards to his own behoof, how was I to prevent it ? and, in such a case, what the better should I be of the search ? Yet, upon considering every thing,—the hopelessness in other quarters, the necessity of making some attempt, and running some risk,—and when I called to mind the strictness of Nadir in all matters relating to courts of justice, and the serious and notorious danger of offending in such points, it appeared to me, that confiding to the integrity of a public officer was on the whole a safer course to pursue than putting so serious a trust in any private individual of whose character I was utterly ignorant : and therefore I made up my mind to seek the cauzee's assistance in the matter.

The cauzee, a dark square-built man, with an aspect and demeanour well suited to the terrors of his office, received me with moody solemnity. I took the precaution of exacting an oath from him, by which he bound himself to let me depart unmolested from his presence, in case he should decline interfering in my business, and then I

related it. The scowl which sat upon his heavy brow during the first part of my story, gave way to a gleam of wistful impatience when he heard of the buried treasure.—“Be at rest,” said he, controlling his satisfaction with difficulty, “I will attend to the matter: do you leave with me the marks and bearings of the spot where this money is deposited;—six hundred tomauns in gold, you say?”—“Only five hundred, may it please you.”—“Well, five hundred: let me know the spot, and we shall soon release them. Yes, yes:—come hither again the day after to-morrow, and you shall hear all about it.”—“Pardon me, cauzee, I go with you, or you have nothing to do with the business.”—“How, fellow!—you go?”—“Yes, cauzee.”—“What! *you* go into the man’s underoon—his harem? What an extravagance!—No, no;—that would never answer:—you must trust to me, the proper officer;—justice will see you righted.”—“Pardon me, cauzee, it must be as I say, or not at all.”—“Stakfurullah! I tell you it cannot be!—What! a man like you, —an outlaw, interfere with justice?—Take care, you had best, and attend to my orders.”—“May God protect you, then, cauzee!—if this is your way, the money shall lie quiet enough I warrant it:—I defy any one of you to find it.”—“Hah! dare you brave me?—Without, there! the fu-roshes!—be alert!—seize this fellow!”

“Listen to me, cauzee,” said I, coolly shaking off the men who entered to seize me: “I am an old soldier; under a cloud at present, it is true, or you would not have dared to use me thus; and the day may yet come when the shah will remember his old and faithful servant. The sun may be hid for a season, but the storm blows over, and his face shines out as light as ever:—but let that pass. I am an old soldier, and know what pain and sufferings are;—inflict on me as much as you dare, but not one word do you get from my lips, nor one tomaun for your purse. On the other hand, do your duty fairly; assist me in recovering what is my own, and neither your trouble nor your civility shall go without reward.”

The cauzee paused—pondered a little: signed to the men who had been standing at the lower end of the hall to retire; and soon ratified with me a compact, by which, after a certain specific transfer from the property to be recovered, I was to receive the remainder. “And, further,” said he, “as prompt measures are best in such cases, remain a few minutes until I despatch some pressing business, and I will attend you with the necessary party.”

In fact the worthy magistrate did not let the grass grow under his feet. The prospective view of my unfortunate deposit seemed to give wings to the course of justice. Heavens! how the toughest

causes were solved as it were by magic !—plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses appeared, were questioned, and dismissed, with a speed and alacrity which astonished themselves as well as the whole attending audience. Nor did a trifling murmur from the parties by any means discompose my friend the cauzee ; the furosh's stick was the quietus instantly and effectively administered, and every mouth was shut.

At length the court was declared to be closed. The cauzee rose hastily, indued his cloak and slippers, and calling for a secretary and half a dozen of furoshes to attend him, he sallied forth with me to the house of my once happy family. I will not dwell upon the emotion which the sight of the well-known apartments excited in my soul. The owner, in some uneasiness at the cauzee's visit, came forth to meet him ; but dared not object to the search, and he retired to place his family out of our sight. The cauzee seemed inclined to forbid his accompanying us ; but anxious to have all possible checks upon that officer's movements, I insisted on his being present ; and the judge, unable to urge any tolerable reason in prohibition, ceased to object.

We soon reached the inner court, and, having measured three gez, from a particular spot, and counting the fifth stone in the pavement northward, I desired it to be lifted, and the ground

to be dug. This was immediately done ; and no sooner had the stone been removed than evident traces appeared of the ground having been lately disturbed, for the earth was loose. “ The pot lies deeper,” said I, somewhat alarmed at this appearance ; “ dig at least two feet below the pavement.” They did so, and the instrument soon struck upon a substance which emitted a metallic sound. The cauzee’s eyes glistened, and my own heart beat lighter. Another stroke or two, and a brass pot was uncovered. “ Hand it hither,” said the cauzee. “ It is very light,” said the furosh, taking it up ; — “ as light as a feather,” repeated he, chucking the vessel up in the air, and catching it, “ may the devil seize any gold that’s here !” The cauzee’s face grew blank ; and I felt a sad sinking of the heart as this last hope passed from me. “ Dig further—dig about ; the money may have fallen out ;” and they did so ; but no money was there. The ground around it was hard, and unstirred as it had been before I touched any part of it. “ Punah-be-khodah !” cried the cauzee, “ here is some confounded roguery. Be sir-e-shumah ! by your head, oh, Hadjee Shamal !” continued he, addressing the tenant of the house, “ say, what is the meaning of this ? Have *you* been eating dirt ?—have you turned thief ? Say, oh, kumbucht ! (wretch) how is this ?”—“ Kumbucht ! on thy beard, oh, cauzee !

why dost thou abuse me thus? It is thou that eatest filth, and that in no ordinary quantity: when you join *thief* with the name of Hadjee Shamal. By the head of the Prophet, and the holy Kaaba, which I have kissed! I know no more of this gold of the devil, which you are pleased to demand at my hands, than you do of your business; and that's little enough, Heaven knows!" sputtered the hadjee in a fury at the cauzee's attack.

"*La-illah-il-ullah!*" exclaimed the judge, "have ye heard him?—and is it me, thou less than man! thou ill-conditioned, foul-mouthed hadjee, whom thou darest to accuse of ignorance of my duty? *Barekillah!* but have a care; the cauzee and the fellick have some connection together," &c. &c. And they continued to abuse one another for some time unintermittingly, and both speaking at once, until, ashamed I suppose of their unseemly violence, and recollecting that it could lead to no result, they came to a compromise, and the hadjee swore upon the koran that he neither knew nor ever had known of, nor touched the gold or pot in question.

"He sayeth the truth, O cauzee!" observed I, holding up a small scroll which had dropped from out of the brazen vessel:—"had this man been the thief, what need had he to mock us with this? And yet who can have done it?" And I read as

follows :—" Life is a thorny path :—fortune will frown ;—riches flee away ; friendship alone remaineth, like the gold that is pure, unchanged, in the furnace of adversity :—seek then, O friend, thy solace in the bosom of friendship !"

" Mockery, indeed !—may their fathers burn that framed the jest !" exclaimed the cauzee : but we must examine old Allee Mouraud Thajir, the owner of this dwelling."—" It will be to no purpose, I fear," replied I with a sigh, for strange indefinite alarms were now darting through my bosom. And so indeed it proved ; not a proof, not a reasonable ground of suspicion could be adduced against the old thajir ; the very look of greedy disappointment with which he heard of the treasure which had, as might be said, been within his clutches, although he knew it not, was sufficient to clear him from all doubt : even the cauzee saw this, and found himself forced, very unwillingly, to give the matter up, and submit to his disappointment.

But what was his disappointment to mine ? Desponding—almost deprived of hope, I returned to our wretched home, which, miserable as it was ; we might soon be deprived of, and communicated to Noor Mahomed the fruitless result of my inquiries. Poor fellow ! bitterly was he suffering under the pangs of deferred hope : nor could I, depressed as I was, afford him any well-grounded consolation. I refrained however from aggra-

vating his distress by communicating any part of the horrible doubts which were beginning to spring up in my mind ; and which, although I dared not to admit them even to myself in any tangible shape, nor boldly to weigh their probability, still failed not to insinuate their serpent-like venom into my soul, and create the most agonising pain :—“ Who,” urged these demons of suspicion—“ who was there that had any knowledge of thy secret treasures, except thy wife—thy dear Shireen—the adored of thy youth—thy earliest love—thy long-lost and joyfully recovered Shireen ? who could possibly have removed them except by her consent and instructions ? and to whom, consistently with honour, or with duty, could she have furnished these instructions, or given that consent ? Remember too the acknowledgment returned to Hadjee Abdool Kauder, with her hand and seal : these were no forgeries—no deceit—no mistake could be there :—and what can all this mean ?” I shut my eyes, and dashed my closed hands against my head with bitter violence, as if to shut out and drive away the frightful conclusion to which these inexplicable facts and this involuntary reasoning were fast reducing me.

Happily the same view of the subject never appeared to have suggested itself to Noor Mahomed. Broken as he was in health, he had enough to brood upon without this last evil ;—the

wife of his love, and his little one snatched from him for ever!—perished perhaps by brutal violence; or if still existing, pining in irremediable misery,—lost to him and to herself: his friend and brother lamenting a like bereavement, and poverty and misery of every sort pressing fast upon both.

“We must turn calunders at last in good earnest, and assume the dervish’s cloak and koolah,” said I with a forced smile, as we talked over our forlorn condition in sufficiently desponding terms.—“Ah! you, my dear Ismael, may strive to lengthen out your existence; and God grant that happier days may yet dawn for you! but with me it is over:—my journey ends here:—out of Mushed never shall I go. My spirits are all gone, and my heart is broken, I think.—I doubt if even the sight of *her* could now revive me!”—“Pshah!—how you talk, man!” said I, forcing a laugh, while my heart sunk at the gloomy solemnity of his tone:—“what a *pitiful* strain is this for a dashing young fellow like you to use!—why, you are fit to beat me at jereed-bazee yet.—I wish we had but good horses, and a fair maidaun to try upon.”—“No more maidauns for me,” said he, shaking his head, with a melancholy smile, which went like a dagger to my heart; and yet there was a faint sparkle in his hollow eye at the thought of a maidaun and a good horse, which communicated a ray of that hope which I was eager enough to cherish.

“ By the way,” said I, to change the most painful part of the subject, “we have one arrow in our quiver yet, and that not the worst: who can say but it may prove the one to hit the mark? We have still my deposit at Futehabad, and it must be looked after without delay; and God avert that any officious friend may have taken that also into his protection! It is you doubtless, my dear Noor Mahomed, whom the taunting thief points at as the friend on whom I am to lean; and in that at least he spoke no untruth.” Another faint smile replied to the last part of my remark. To the first he answered, “No, Ismael, I will not cramp your efforts by my inability: I could not reach Futehabad in my present condition. Go you alone; the enterprise requires activity. I will remain here, keeping view of our principal object. If I live, you will find me here on your return:—if not,—”—“Nay, my dear friend, do not speak thus: I scarcely can tell you why, but my hopes are high, Noor Mahomed, and I have great faith in such presentiments: they did not deceive me when we first arrived here; nor will they, trust me, now; so keep up your spirits and your health. In eight days, unless something happens more untoward than I look for, we shall meet again.”

But in order to perform my journey with any tolerable speed, it was indispensable for me to be

mounted: this was not to be done without money; and in order to obtain that necessary article, there was no other means than to swallow my pride, and address myself to Hadjee Abdool Kauder, the merchant, who alone of all my acquaintance had deigned to acknowledge me, and not only to express himself touched with my misfortunes, but disposed to relieve them. To him then I told all that happened, and explained my remaining hope, with the difficulty which I felt in proceeding to my former government without either horse or money.

The hadjee was a man of few words, and obtruded his counsel on no one unasked: he listened attentively to my account of the search for my money, and approved of my immediately proceeding to Karaboulagh. "As for the means," continued he, "they shall not be wanting: I have a yaboo as stout as any in Khorasan, which shall carry you thither in three days' riding; and you shall not lack what will subsist you both. But you had better put on some disguise; although your altered countenance and attire may almost answer the purpose. Enter the village after dusk, or, if possible, avoid it altogether, and make your search at night and alone. In one hour the horse shall be ready:—if you find your money you shall pay me for him: if not, he and the money I give you are yours. So, bismillah! may luck go with you!"

CHAPTER IX.

ADVENTURES.

THE hadjee was as good as his word. I bade adieu to Noor Mahomed, with a beating and almost a despairing heart, in spite of the presentiments of which I had boasted to him, and which in truth I felt, and soon bestrode the yaboo, a stout willing beast, which bid fair to justify its master's encomiums. But swiftly though it sped, its pace was far outstript by the current of busy thoughts which rushed through the brain of its rider. Was it indeed possible that as we passed through the long cultivated valley which stretches towards Radcan from Mushed, the remembrance of other days, and of the many times I had traversed the same ground under circumstances so different, should fail to rise and lead me into long and painful recollections? The present soon faded away, and the inward eye of memory turned back upon the course of past existence. The scenes of my

desert life were once more fresh before me ; the peaceful days of my childhood, and the wild tumultuous delight of my first exploits. The image of Selim arose, the noble, the kind, the true ;—the brother of my earliest affections ! But the springs of pent up tenderness gushed forth from my eyes as the fairy form of the little Shireen passed before my thoughts, and I rapidly retraced the whole tenour of our intercourse, until we parted for the last time. And then would the indefatigable remembrancer conjure up the painful scenes which snatched me from my Toorkoman life, and threw me on the world. The youthful joy, the transport, the amazement which distracted me as the wonders of that world burst in succession upon my senses: then the true and noble friends who took the young enthusiast by the hand, and placed him in the path of glory. The gallant Ibrahim—ay, and his sterner brother, then so indulgent ;—the worthy Caleb Allee Beg ;—the kind and faithful Yar Mahomed ;—my own attached old Cossim !—these and many others, the early and the latter friends of the now forlorn Ismael, all passed before the mental eye like ghosts of the departed, tearing open the wounds of my heart until it seemed rent in twain. Then too came the brilliant spectacles and pageants of my life—the gallant fields—the maddening hours of battle and of triumph !—the intoxicating voice of praise—the rewards of

bravery or merit bestowed in the face of the assembled host by a generous and gracious chief—the long and toilsome marches—the brilliant conquests—the glory and the riches which crowned a long succession of heroic achievements, in all of which the now ruined Ismael had largely shared :—these, and a dazzling train of such retrospections, flitted like shooting stars athwart my brain, in glittering but melancholy contrast to the dreary present !

And was it then possible ? had all these glorious realities in truth faded—melted into nothing, like the vapours of the desert that mock the thirsty traveller ? was my occupation and business in life then quite gone, while yet my hair was dark and my cheek unfurrowed by time ? and could all that host of friends, living as well as dead, be lost to me for ever ? Alas ! how many were indeed thus passed away ; and of those who remained, how many countenances were dark towards the fallen Ismael ! how few even dared to acknowledge him ! But were all in truth thus ? was there not one friend who would stand forth to shelter his devoted head, and cheer his withered heart ? Yes ! Abboo Talib ; the good, the true, the steadfastly affectionate Abboo Talib !—how could I have so long forgotten him ? Yes, if he lives—if he but knew his friend's distress, how quickly would he fly to aid him ; for Meerza Abboo Talib's is not the heart to quail before the power of a tyrant, or

to abandon his friend because that power hath stricken him. But why should it be so difficult to discover the residence of my friend ? might not tidings of him be had even in Mushed ? The excitement occasioned by this idea was so great, that the thought of at once turning back to press an inquiry so important occurred to me ; but the recollection of the still nearer and more interesting object with which my present errand was connected restrained me, and I resolved upon performing it, be the event what it would, before returning. Yet the belief that Aboo Talib still lived, and that in him I possessed a friend on whom I could repose in perfect confidence, communicated an exhilaration and comfort to my spirit, to which for many a day I had been a stranger. Nor was it until long afterwards that I remembered that Aboo Talib actually held in trust for me a sum of money sufficient to supply Noor Mahomed and myself with all comforts, and enable us to prosecute our search and inquiries with full effect.

Thoughts similar to those described, but somewhat more cheerful in their complexion, were my sole companions during the remainder of this journey. Towards the afternoon of the third day, after descending the pass of Kothul-e-khohadafereen, and passing the tower and plain so fully present to my remembrance as the scene of my

skirmish along with the gallant Ibrahim Khan against the Toorkomans, I reached the district of my late command, and, not long after, entered the shaggy brushwood that skirted and confined the village cultivation.

Having secured my horse in a retired thicket, and attended to all his wants, I lay down to take, if possible, a few hours' repose, in order to fit myself for the exertions that might yet be required. The excitement of my mind, however, long kept sleep away, in spite of fatigue; and when it did visit me, it was rather in the shape of a feverish delirium than of refreshing slumber, and bringing dreams and visions more like those which haunt the couch of the sick or the guilty than the healthy and innocent. Again I was a prisoner among the Affghauns, and savage shapes applied the torture or threatened the cord; again did the stern voice of Nadir thunder in my ear the words which sent me from his presence a friendless outcast on the earth; and the same fiendish shapes were once more mangling my unhappy brother. Then I was digging in the earth which teemed with pots of treasure; but as fast as I touched them they were whirled away, or began to reel about in a confusion that maddened me; and fiends yelled, and wild shapes, all bearing a fantastic resemblance to those I had once known, chattered and mowed around me. It was a hellish hubbub;

but in the height of it a female form appeared, and the fiends fled ; and the scene changed to a well remembered spot—it was the sweet Chushmah Jemallee, as in the days of my boyhood ; and I was running towards the vision who had caused the change, when my exertion awoke me.

The day was already gone, and the shades and dews of evening were fast falling. I gazed around me in astonishment, for the visions of my dream had banished all recollection of my real situation ; nor was that astonishment diminished when my eyes, as they wandered around in slow recognition of the truth, fell upon the figure of a female, who, covered with her veil, was seated under a bush, opposite to, and watching me intently. Still unable completely to disentangle the confusion between my sleeping and my waking thoughts, and doubtful whether this might not indeed be one of the obscure forms which had haunted my dreams, I half started up ; upon which the figure rushing forward fell at my feet, and clasping my knees, broke out passionately, “ My master ! my dear master ! ” and continued to utter a thousand exclamations expressive of the most fervent joy.

Utterly at a loss to comprehend what all this might mean, and divided between the confusion of my still wandering thoughts and an obscure suspicion of treachery, I strove to rise, in which I so far succeeded as to get upon my feet ; but

could not shake off the female, who clung to my knees with almost convulsive force, still weeping and exclaiming in a voice interrupted by sobs.

“ In the name of God !” said I at last, “ who are you, and what does all this mean ?”—“ Oh ! do you not know me then ?” exclaimed she in reply ; “ yet how should you recognise me thus, and in such a place ?—and you too are changed, my dear master ;—oh, I should never have known you !”—“ But, in the name of the holy Prophet ! I ask it again—say, who are you ? Your voice is familiar ;—but this failing light—and that veil—” “ Oh, I forgot,” returned she, tearing off her veil ; “ but well do you know this voice ; and well might you recognise these features, if grief and misery had not sorely changed them !—Know you not Sitara ? the Sitara of your own Shireen !—the little slave you gave her, when—oh, how happy were we then !” and again she burst into a passionate fit of sobs and tears ; and then I did remember her ; and, oh ! what a revulsion did the recollection create in my heart ! “ Sitara ! my poor girl !” I almost shrieked, as I clasped the slave in my arms, “ and where—where is your mistress ?” and terror for the answer she might give took from me the power of further words.

“ Oh ! where indeed is she ?” echoed the slave, “ my poor unhappy mistress ! Alas ! that is hidden

from Sitara: she hoped that my lord might have known it; for since that terrible day I have never seen her; no, nor your lordship's noble sister, the dear and excellent Hoosseinee."—"But what terrible day, Sitara? Explain; what do you speak of?"—"Oh, sir! that fearful day, when our house was plundered by the prince's orders; when every human being in it was carried off, or turned naked out of doors, as if it had been an enemy's village they were chappowing.* Ay, and we were not the only ones that suffered."—"And where was all this? Tell me; for as yet scarce a fact beyond their loss have I been able to establish; although, God knows, ever since my return, both day and night have my whole life been spent in thinking, speaking, and seeking for intelligence."—"Oh! I will tell you all I know, and yet it is but little. Peacefully and calmly did we live, sir, from the time when yourself, and my lord, your brother-in-law, left us, for more than two years; and excepting the families of some of those officers and khans who were your friends, my lord, not a soul did we see; for the khanum, dear lady, is, as you well know, sir, a gentle and retired person, of pensive disposition, and little did she care for besides her children and her sister-in-law, whose lively spirits sometimes made her smile, and cheered her. And they would talk of you, my

* Plundering; sacking.

lord, and of your brother; and sometimes, when tidings came from the army, it rejoiced them to hear of your high fame.

“It was principally for the sake of such intelligence that my lady cared to receive the visits of the khanums I have spoken of; for they sometimes had accounts when she had none: at others it was our good fortune, and they came in turn to hear of their husbands from us; and, oh! what long confabulations they would have together, while the slave-girls sat and worked around them, listening as attentively as their mistresses to all their grand accounts of battles, and of plunder, and riches, gained by the king and all his lords! —Alas! we hoped that this would bring you all soon back to us again, and we heartily rejoiced in the success of the shah.

“And during this time, my lord, your son, the dear little Ibrahim, had grown so tall and bold, and your daughter so fair and lovely, that she was like a child of the fairies; and the little boy, who was not born when you left us, sir, was such a charming infant; and your sister's children too—your little nephews, both equally delightful. —Oh! what infants!—what children!—how sweet it was to see them all playing together, like a group of the fairest flowers in our little garden! and their dear mothers watching them with such eyes!—only that those of my own dear mistress

would often fill with tears as she bent over her little Aboo Talib.—Oh ! where—where are they all now ?—Oh God ! oh God ! shall I never see their lovely faces 'more ?"—For some minutes the agony of the poor creature rendered her incapable of proceeding ; nor could I, indeed, have urged her ; for a feeling of suffocation in my own throat prevented me as effectually from speaking for the time.

“ Well, sir,” continued she at last, “ it was thus we lived, peaceably, and, but for anxiety, not unhappily. We felt not, although we heard of the tyrannical conduct of Reza Koolee Meerza, who, sometimes residing at Ispahan, sometimes in Casveen, and at others in Mushed, seemed to think of nothing else than plundering the merchants and ryots of the little money which his father's exactions had left them. The cry, though we heard it not, was great in the land ; for the methods he had recourse to for raising the money he required were cruel and grievous to be borne. Among others, he had agents, it was said, in the royal camp, who gave notice whenever any person of consequence, known to have property at home, fell under the royal displeasure, by the same couriers who were charged with the shah's dispatches. Thus, whatever might be the ultimate intentions of his majesty, the prince took instant steps for confiscating the property of such persons,

and completing their ruin ; nay, where any suspicion was entertained of money being concealed, and that was not seldom, their families were seized and made the means of extorting it by way of ransom. In other cases, the women and children were carried off to the prince's own harem, or for the use of his household, or given up to his officers—ay, often, as has been said, to the meanest of his grooms ; while the males, naked and maimed, were turned adrift to perish as they might.

“ My lord, thus did it fare with your own unfortunate family. Faithfully was the news of your disgrace conveyed to the prince, and instantly was an officer with a party of nassakchees and furoshes despatched to plunder the house, and seize upon your family. So sudden was the stroke, that not the remotest fear of any thing amiss had been entertained by one of its members : for my own part, I was absent, having been sent by my mistress on a message to certain of her female friends, in order to learn whether any arrivals had in reality taken place from the army. By the time I returned every thing was in confusion ; a crowd had assembled at the door, so great, that I scarcely could force my way in ; and when I had done so, not a soul was to be seen except the furoshes and officers, bearing off the packages of furniture which they had collected together :

and the dust which arose from the almost ruined building too plainly declared that it had no longer an inhabitant.

“The scream which escaped me at this sight, as I sunk thunderstruck on the ground, passed unnoticed in the uproar; but it attracted the attention of a kind-hearted female neighbour, who, guessing that I belonged to the unfortunate family, had me lifted up and carried to her own house; where, after recovering, I learned only what I have now related. Not one word could I hear of my mistress or any of the family: some indeed said that certain women and children had been seen carried off to Tucht-e-rowans, which waited at a little distance; but nothing in the least certain could be gathered on the subject, although the kind-hearted person who saved me from the wreck took no small pains in inquiring; nor, although I waited upon many ladies of rank to whom my mistress was known, could they, or would they tell me any thing about her. Some asserted that she had positively never entered the prince’s harem; others spoke more darkly on the subject; but the greater number refused to hold any communication with even a slave who had belonged to a proscribed family. At last, my lord, wearied out with ineffectual and impotent inquiries, I resolved to come to this place, where it was just possible that something might be

gathered ; and where I thought that I might at least exist quietly and unquestioned until the truth should appear, and better days perhaps return."

"And is this all, Sitara? know you nothing more?"—"Alas! no, sir."—"Well, bad as it is, there is scarcely more in what you have told me than I knew myself. But what goes on at the village?—who is in my place?—how is the kallah occupied?"—"The prince, my lord," said Sitara, "has appointed Nasser Beg Khan Jalloyer as governor of the district in your room; but he is now in attendance upon his royal highness, who has set out to meet the shah: and the kallah contains only a part of his family left in charge of his naib, who remains there with a small garrison to protect its inmates from any sudden attack of rebels or of robbers; for people in these parts are not now kept so much in awe as when the shah was nigh at hand. But, my lord, they are aware of your arrival at Mushed, and have resolved that if you approach this quarter, or attempt to use the smallest influence with the people of the district,—if, in fact, you are seen here at all, you shall be seized and imprisoned until the khan's pleasure be known: it was of this I came to warn you; and oh, my dear master! do not approach any nearer, for the men are fell

and bloody, and your death would be certain if you were discovered."

"They would find some work to do before they mastered me," muttered I with a grim smile, "changed even as I am:—but how, child, didst thou know I was here? how could you seek to warn me?"—"I knew it well," she replied; "it was revealed to me: the call was dark and doubtful; but I thank Heaven that I listened to it, and have found you still in safety. For many a night past had my mind been dwelling on the melancholy catastrophe of my mistress and her family, with even more than usual earnestness; for when—oh! when is it altogether absent from my thoughts?—and I saw my poor mistress in my dreams, sometimes shrieking as she did when torn from her home on that frightful day, and sometimes smiling faintly as was her wont in days of happiness. But for three nights past it has been borne upon my very soul that you, my lord, were near; and I was bid to seek you out, to warn, and to assist you; for that, friendless and alone, you were exposed to great danger. How it was that my mind became possessed with the assurance that in this very place you were to be found, I cannot tell, for it is not often visited; and I have only seen it when the villagers have come hither to seek their stray cattle: but the

voice was of a true heavenly messenger—of that be sure: and oh, my lord, listen to its warning and tempt no further danger.”

I mused for a while upon all that the slave had told me. At length I said to her, “Sitara, the voice spoke truly and the warning was a kind one; but we must read it right: the perils which we know of are not the most dangerous. I *must* go to the village—ay, into the kallah, and that this very night; and it is by your aid I must do so.” The slave almost shrieked: a burst of frantic sorrow and earnest dissuasives evinced her utter horror at my fool-hardiness. When I explained to her, however, that upon the performance of my duty here might probably depend the best chance of discovering the fate of her mistress, she became more calm; but it was yet some time before she was composed enough to listen to my plans, and comprehend the means by which I proposed to execute them.

“The point which it is essential for me to reach, Sitara,” said I, when at length I had fixed her attention, “is the little garden, north of the under-
room of the kallah. You know that it communicates with those private apartments by a wicket; and that there is another wicket at the foot of the garden itself, by which workmen, when required, had access given them. Now this is what you must do:—you must run back immediately to the

kallah, and contrive to unfasten that door: the retired lane on which it opens will be quiet enough before midnight; and we can enter it and do all that I require after that hour, and yet be far enough distant before morning.”—“Yes, sir,” replied the slave, “if you are not seen in the mean time. But you seem to have forgot that there are some windows of the women’s apartments which look down into that very garden: and what are you to do if the alarm is given? The sight of a man there would put the whole place in an uproar. As for women,—if you had a woman’s veil only—” —“Right! right!” returned I, “a woman’s veil is just the thing, if it can be had.”—“Oh! if that were the worst, I can supply that: I have another veil. If it must be so, I will meet you with it at the water-course near the south end of the village, and we can enter together: no one will think of disturbing two women.”—“No,” replied I; “and if they were to do so I am prepared—I have a dagger.”—“Ah! little good would that do,” said she, half shuddering: “we must try not to need it. As for the garden door, I think there will be little difficulty in managing that; for now that the principal part of the family are absent, the entrances are less looked after, and it is only fastened by bolts drawn on the inside; and there is no difficulty in reaching the garden from the underoon, for herbs and leaves and various things

are always wanted ; so that going into it even at night will cause no suspicion : there is only an old woman to attend it, and she is half stupid."

"Well, then, my good girl, away.— You can easily reach the kallah before the gates are shut. At half an hour before midnight I will be at the water-course, and from thence we shall go to the garden ; but mind, fail me not ; for to attempt the business I am resolved ; and if the door cannot be forced or opened the wall must be tried."—"Inshallah !" said she, but trembling nevertheless—"inshallah! it shall not need:" and again embracing my knees, she plunged into the thicket and disappeared.

Left once more alone, I fell into a train of reflections on the fortunate and most unhopèd-for rencounter ; and on the story which poor Sitara had related to me ; but, after all, what information did it afford me ? I knew already that I had been pillaged, robbed of name and place, of property and family, by orders of the prince : it threw not a ray of light upon the fate of any member of that family ; and although the painful possibility of their having fallen into the royal hands still remained, there was nothing in what I had heard to confirm it. The very enterprise in which I was engaged might, if successful, yield me more satisfactory results.

With such employment for the mind, time

passed with unusual rapidity, until I saw by the position of the heavenly bodies, and the well-known landmarks around me, that night was fast approaching. Leaving therefore my horse secured in the same spot, and supplied sufficiently with fodder from the meadows around, I hastened to the place of appointment. The slave was there already. "All is prepared," said she; "the door is unbarred: that was done easily and unnoticed, for no suspicion whatever seems afloat; nor, inshallah! in this dark night will there be any great risk of discovery: so, if it must be, my lord, bismillah! let us begone:—here is my veil." I took it and attempted to put it on; but the unaccustomed task was awkwardly performed, and the slave came to my aid. "You tremble, girl," said I. "I do indeed, my lord:—oh! have I not cause?—would to Allah it were over! but indeed I am most willing. Oh! how readily would I give my life for good news of my dear mistress!—It is only this midnight work:—it is terrible:—but pardon me, I will not fail, my lord:" and the poor girl, having adjusted my dress, was as eager to proceed as myself.

Pressing through bush, brier, and cultivation, we soon reached the outskirts of the well-known village. The growl of a half-roused dog admonished us now and then to caution; but we held our way unmolested to the blind lane, on the north

side of the kallah, in which was the wicket. All was still as death: the silence and the solitude were as perfect as we could have desired. We reached the wicket, which yielded to the impulse of Sitara's arm. We entered cautiously; and I found myself once more in the little garden which had been the scene of my own infant sports, and since then the delight of my dear Shireen; but now tenanted by strangers, who, had they but seen me, would have unscrupulously sacrificed me as a robber and a thief.

The garden lay in profound stillness as well as darkness. At one end was the wall of the harem; from the higher part of which two narrow windows, admitting light through screens of carved wood-work, could scarcely be said to overlook the place; for the inmates of these rooms could not, without aid, rise to the height of the apertures. No light was burning in them, and all things seemed secure; so I proceeded at once to business. Besides a variety of young and lately planted trees which embellished the garden, there was one remarkable group, consisting of a fine old sycamore, and two or three others of smaller size, which in summer formed a delightful shade; and close to them had been formed a cistern, usually kept full of water by means of a pipe, communicating with a little rivulet on this side of the village. It was at a point between these

trees and the cistern,—a part of the ground never touched by instrument for any purpose of culture, —and under a thick tortuous root of the principal tree, that I had buried my treasure. To this point therefore did I immediately direct my attention; and armed with the digging instrument, which Sitara had secured for me, with as little noise as possible I began to move the soil. It was hard, and some slight sound was unavoidably produced; but no alarm seemed to be taken, and I worked with an earnestness and caution which made the perspiration stream from my brow. Immediately beneath the surface I was somewhat alarmed at observing the same looseness of texture which had struck me in the examination at Mushed in presence of the cauzee; and soon the instrument met with the resistance which declared its having reached the object of our search. Swiftly did I disentangle, and eagerly did I seize the vessel; but the first touch was sufficient to inform me that here also I had been anticipated, and that my money was gone!

Painful and chilling as was this disappointment of my last hope, I did not permit it to overwhelm me; nor did my inquiry terminate with ascertaining that my gold was gone. Removing the slight covering of the vessel, I dipped my hand into it. This time I was not disappointed: a scroll of paper as in the former met my grasp, which, draw-

ing forth, I placed carefully in my bosom. But scarcely had I satisfied myself of there being nothing else in the vessel, when the sound of distant voices alarmed us both, and induced us to take shelter beneath the darkest shadow of the sycamores.

The speakers approached, and we could hear first the voices, and then the words: "Allah!" whispered Sitara, "it is the naib himself, and Allee Khaujeh, the nazir of the khan's harem! what can have brought them here?" A pressure of the arm was the signal by which I silenced her; for their conversation now became intelligible, as they passed slowly down a walk but three or four yards distant. "I know not," said the rough voice of the naib, "how it can be; but the fact is certain: the chupper who brought the advice has half killed a capital Yamoot horse by riding day and night. He swears he is scarcely fifty hours from Mushed, and that that 'pider soochteh' only left it six hours before him on a sorry yaboo; so that he can't be near us till to-morrow or next day."

"Punah-be-khodah! who can tell that?" exclaimed the shrill voice of the khaujeh, "these lion-eating musahebs* of the shah can do most marvellous things; and he was none of your meek

* Companions; confidential servants.

ones,—a real azerburzeen* they say: and, holy Prophet! old Kauder Bukhsh swears that she heard strange sounds to-night in this very garden.”—“By the head of Allee, that is well!” laughed the rough voice of the naib: “why, Nazir, you are becoming an old woman in truth, now: how in the devil’s name could any thing get in here without your own knowledge, unless an owl or a fox perhaps?—But come, I will take a turn here, and see that all is safe on this side; you had better return and keep all quiet in the underoon. If I catch the ghorumsaug, there is no fear he will ever frighten you again:—leave me to deal with him. I know my master’s mind, and my own too, mashallah!—Away with you, friend!” With these words, leaving the khaujeh, who went to the underoon, he proceeded down a cross walk which led him further from us.

We watched him in his rounds until he reached the garden wicket, which had been left slightly a-jar for the convenience of easy egress, and could hear his smothered growl of surprise and displeasure at the neglect as he termed it. Soon after the bolts were replaced; but our apprehension was painfully increased when we heard a key grate in a lock, which, for the most part, was scarcely ever used. “The fool has sealed his

* Literally “fire in the saddle.”

own fate," muttered I involuntarily, as I heard this ominous sound; "I would fain have kept from blood, had he left me free."—"Oh! do not shed blood, dear master," whispered the slave, grasping my arm."—"Hush!—be still, upon your life," replied I, in the low but fixed tone of desperate resolution. And I balanced the possibility of wrenching open the door with the instrument in my hand, in order to avoid, if possible, the necessity of spilling life, even though of the very man who had but just made so light of my own.

But when did human will or power ever alter a decree of destiny? The events of this night were written in the book of the Almighty before the world began:—how vain then the hope to avoid them! The naib in his rounds had approached the sycamore trees so nearly, that he stood at length by the brink of the cistern, when, by some accident, a portion of the earth which had been shovelled from the hole fell back into it, causing a slight noise. It startled him. "How now?" he exclaimed; "who's there?" and turning round, in spite of the darkness, the light colour of Sitara's veil, no doubt, caught his view; for he continued, "What the devil!—women!—and the door open too!" This unlucky discovery was conclusive: yet still I paused, reluctant to adopt the last resource, when his rising voice which would soon have spread the alarm, decided me, and the heavy

instrument which I held was raised like lightning, and fell as swiftly upon his head with stunning violence. “Quick,—quick, Sitara!” cried I: “run and unbar the wicket, while I search him for the keys;” and, while the trembling slave obeyed me, I groped out from the pockets of the fallen naib a bunch of keys, among which proved to be the one I wanted: nor was I sorry to believe, from a heavy groan which escaped him during this operation, that the blow might not be mortal.—“Inshallah!” thought I, “I shall not have this man’s blood upon my head!” But the chance of his recovery quickened our movements: the bolts were drawn; and after a few unsuccessful attempts the key was found. The gate opened; and we found ourselves in the little lane beyond, with liberty for the price of our exertions.

I need not tell with what speed we made towards the spot where my horse was concealed. But the poor slave was ill prepared for such rough and thorny ground as that over which we had to pass, and in a night so dark; for, anxious to elude pursuit, I left the plainest paths, preferring the wilder and less frequented tracks; and before we had gone half our distance Sitara had lost a slipper, and wounded her feet with the stones so badly that she could scarce proceed. But what exertions will not the fear of death call forth, even from the weakest? Assisted, supported,—partly carried by

me, with a shred from my girdle wrapped round her wounded foot, at length we reached the thicket, where she threw herself exhausted on the ground until I prepared the yaboo for his double burden.

Before this was accomplished lights were seen glancing in the village, and tokens of alarm were perceptible; but, mounted on my stout yaboo, with Sitara sitting behind me upon a pad, formed hastily out of my veil, and a shred of old numud which had covered my saddle, I felt confident of gaining the passes, and probably the upper country, before they should overtake, or, at least, discover us, even should they urge their pursuit so far, upon the faint grounds they could have for suspecting the cause of the alarm. Indeed if the naib were really dead, or incapable of giving information, the chances against us would still be diminished.

Fortune, at all events, appeared disposed to befriend us; for, after travelling all night with great rapidity, considering the toilsome ascent we had to make, we found ourselves, by morning, high up in one of the passes, and among ground where I should have defied all the riders they could muster to detect us. Dismounting now myself, I urged on our horse to the full extent of his powers and my own; nor did I stop, except occasionally to let him crop a mouthful of grass in some retired

nook, or to refresh ourselves for a few moments at some clear rivulet, until the shades of night were nearly falling again, and we had reached the little plain of Hissarcheh, full eighteen fursungs from the village of Futehabad. Then, and not until then, did I halt in a little hollow where my horse might crop some sweet grass ; and having seen an encampment of Eeliauts at a little distance, I resolved to repair thither and solicit from them what might sustain the exhausted frames of Sitara and myself: for as to placing ourselves in their power by entering their tents as guests, I thought that in our situation such a risk was best avoided.

But before the failing light should quite depart there was a point of great interest which claimed immediate attention. During the whole of our rapid and arduous retreat from the village, although my mind in recurring to the adventures of the past night failed not to dwell with painful interest upon the singular coincidence which marked the mysterious abstraction of all my deposits of treasure, I had not yet attempted to examine or even look at the scroll which stood in place of the lost gold. Wishing to preserve all my energies unembarrassed to provide for the safety of myself and my new charge, I avoided encountering the painful emotions which this paper might excite, and permitted it to remain in the pocket to which I had consigned it, content every now and then

with satisfying myself that it was safe, until the arrival of a less busy moment. That had now come; and unwilling to defer any longer an examination which might prove of consequence, I produced and unfolded the scroll. It contained only the following words :

“ Oh ! thou who railest against fate, remember that the decrees of destiny are irreversible ; that sorrow and disappointment are the precious balms of the Most High, who out of evil produceth good, and bringeth joy out of sorrow and mourning. Thus sayeth the discreet Talib, the son of Hoossein, the traveller of many lands ; in whose works seek the solace and cure of thy woes.”

“ Strange unaccountable agency !” thought I, as I pondered over this mysterious apothegmatic appeal ; “ is thy ominous and controuling influence to thwart me thus in every effort ?—and yet thy words seem friendly ; God grant their meaning may prove them so !—would I could decypher it ! And again I read the sentence, and weighed the meaning of every word, without discovering aught to enlighten me. A second time had I examined them as carefully as eyesight could effect ; when something in the flourish of one of the terminating letters, which I had till then taken for an accidental blot of the pen, attracted my attention. My eyes grew fixed to the paper ; and a gush of heat burst out from every pore, as the

certainly of its bearing a familiar form rushed upon my mind. It was a small signet mark ; and as I strained my eyes to trace its lines, all doubt soon fled : it was the impression of a little seal which was well known to me ; for often had I remarked it upon the finger of my friend Meerza Aboo Talib himself. These were the curious talismanic characters which had so often excited my curiosity : there could be no mistake.—“ Punah-be-khodah !” exclaimed I aloud, and starting to my feet, as conviction darted through my soul, connecting with lightning speed the whole chain of extraordinary facts :—“ Merciful God ! it is he ;—he himself has done it all, and they are all safe. Oh, God ! Oh, God ! it must be so.” And I fell upon my face and wept aloud.

Recovering, after some moments, from this transport of hope and joy, I turned to the poor slave, who was lost in perfect astonishment at this unexpected rapture, and in a few words imparted to her a share of the hope which had just dawned upon my soul : and the more I revolved every circumstance the better founded did this hope appear.

That the signet and handwriting both of this and the paper taken from the treasure-vessel at Mushed were those of my friend, I was persuaded beyond all doubt. And how could he have acquired a knowledge of these private deposits,

known only to Shireen and me, except by information from Shireen herself? But when could that information have been acquired? I had observed no date in either of the scrolls, but the communication could only have been made at some moment of danger; and by the account of Sitara no such moment had ever occurred:—the threat and the blow fell together. It followed, therefore, that the communication could not have taken place until *after* the plunder of my house and property; and if so, must not Shireen have been free to hold intercourse, and consult with Abboo Talib? She could not then be in the prince's power; Abboo Talib must know where she was; probably he was himself her preserver; perhaps at the moment of her need he stepped in and snatched her from the ruin that was gaping around her. Oh! how I burned to know the truth—to hear the details of this most happy, most incomprehensible event: for my mind was made up as to the fact; and never did a doubt of the truth of my friend, or of my wife, cross my mind. All former treasonable suspicions, all unworthy jealousies, which had lowered like clouds of evil over my soul, were now dissipated, and had left but happy and confiding love behind:—and oh, how delightful was the relief! The contents of these scrolls, before so mysterious, were now fully intelligible; while, couched in terms

incomprehensible to chance finders, they contained intimation calculated for me alone, that happiness and peace were to be found with him. To him then must I fly; and, oh, how tedious would the time appear until the hour of meeting! The fever of my spirits banished all sense of fatigue; and had I been alone, and could my poor beast have borne it, not another hour should have been wasted in delay.

But policy as well as humanity forbade such imprudent haste. Neither horse nor slave were animated by the strong excitement which upheld me; and the wants of both required immediate attention. Dear as life and liberty had both become, it was necessary to risk them in order to procure necessary food; and leaving both Sitara and the yaboo in the place where we had dismounted, I went towards the Eeliaut encampment.

CHAPTER X.

THE EELIAUT CHIEF.

IT proved to be an extensive one. A multitude of cattle and sheep, horses and camels, mules and asses, were gathered round in temporary inclosures of reeds ; or were still straying about the tents with dogs barking at them, and shepherds running about in all directions to secure them for the night. The men were lounging before the tents, and the women were engaged in their household duties, spinning, weaving, making butter and cheese, feeding the young animals, or carrying water for the use of their families. I saw at once from the number of tents, and the size of one or two in the centre, that some chief of importance must be in the aoul ;* and at first I had made up my mind to seek the supply of my wants from some inferior member of the tribe, and thus to avoid inquiries or delays, which might have proved embarrassing from a higher quarter.

* Camp of the division of a tribe.

But just as I had made up my mind to this arrangement, an object which caught my eye changed the intention, and induced me to throw myself at once, and in the most impressive manner, upon the hospitality of the chief himself.

The object which wrought this change of purpose was a troop of some dozen or so of armed horsemen, who were riding in great haste over the plain, in a direction not very different from that by which I had come ; and from their appearance as they approached, I could have little doubt that they were, in fact, a party sent in pursuit of me. To retreat was impossible, for I was close in view of all the tents ; and the precarious generosity of an Eeliaut chief was preferable to the tender mercies of such as I believed that party to consist of. Passing therefore hastily in front of the flanking tents, although their inmates called aloud upon me to stop, to turn in and tell them the news, to accept of their bread and roof, I halted not until I reached the dwelling of the chief, before whose tents were picketed several handsome horses under the hands of their keepers. “ Refuge !—refuge and protection !—the sacred asylum of the stable ! ”* exclaimed I, seizing one of these horses by the head-

* The most sacred asylum for a proscribed or pursued man—even for a murderer, in Persia, is the stable of the king or a noble. See Malcolm s History.—*Translator's note.*

stall, while the groom, respecting the well-known privilege, fell back and gave me way.

The khan himself, for such he proved to be, was walking about superintending the management of his stud; but, upon hearing my words, and seeing my action, he turned and inquired who I might be. "I am a man," said I, "and an unfortunate one, although guilty of no crime: as such, khan, I claim from you present protection, and concealment from my pursuers. As you love and practice hospitality, and value a high and honourable name among the tribes, pledge it to me, and let there be no delay."—"It is granted, friend," said the khan, coming forward and taking me with his own hand from the place of my asylum. "I swear it to you by my own head and the tomb of my father:—and now what is to be done?"—"Behold!" said I, pointing to the party which now rose above the brow of a swelling ground, only a short space distant—"behold my pursuers! conceal me instantly from their eyes—the rest you shall quickly know; and if you deem me criminal, you have but to yield me to them at last."—"Yield you! after my oath!—No; by the holy Kaaba, I have said it, and you are safe, if the blood of my son were on your hands!" And the words of the khan were echoed by his kindred who had gathered about us; and who now

closing around, shut me out from view of all approaching eyes.

The khan then made me a signal to follow, which I did into a smaller tent connected with the public one in front. "This is my khelwut; here you are safe;—but stay, you are thirsty and fatigued.—Ho, there! my sherbet and bread—let us eat:" and in a few moments buttermilk and water, with some morsels of bread and cheese, were brought us, and the khan gave me to eat; and drinking a few mouthfuls himself, handed me the bowl. "You are welcome," repeated he: "and now inform me what you further require."

"These horsemen," said I, "if my suspicion is just, are from the fort of Nasser Beg Khan of Karaboulagh: they seek my life."—"Piderish be soozed!"* exclaimed the khan with an angry contempt, which it rejoiced me to remark: "what has that unblest dog to do with thee?—Hast thou slain his uncle?"—"No," replied I: "if the stain of blood attach to any, it is rather to him than to me.—Listen, khan! I was an officer of some consequence in the presence of the shah; but evil and false reports were against me, and I was unjustly disgraced: the substance which remained to me has been devoured by Prince Reza Koolee Meerza, and this governor, who have also seized upon, or

* May his father be burned.

dispersed my whole family. I am now seeking them; and in the hope of obtaining some intelligence of them, perhaps too of collecting some relics of my property, I went to Futehabad; but finding myself proscribed in the place where once I had a happy home, I fled only last night with a single woman slave, the only remaining creature of all my household. In my efforts to escape their hands, I hurt—I hope I did not slay—the naib who holds the kallah in absence of the khan.—And now, khan, will you protect and assist me?”

“Protect you?—and against Nasser Beg Khan? By the soul of my father and your own head, I will conceal and protect you against that unclean animal and all his base-born gang of followers! May his father’s tomb be polluted! I owe the fellow a grudge, and shall pay my debt too, some day, inshallah!—He must have a strong arm that shall wrench you out from under the shadow of Sooltaun Tymoor Sheikhauloo’s tent!”

“Well, khan, may the blessed Prophet reward you!—but it may be best to set these jackals upon a wrong scent. My way lies to Mushed, whither by your good favour I must hasten: if they could be sent towards Sooltaun Meydaun—” —“Chushm!” said the khan; and speaking a few words in Turkish, mingled with a cant which I did not understand, to one of his sons outside the tent,

he returned to me. "The dogs will hunt upon a wrong scent now, I think; and you are safe, my friend. But pray, how are you to be addressed? What is your fortunate name?"

"When the night is dark, and the stars are clouded, khan, who can distinguish between the eagle and the crow?—But the clouds may disperse, and the stars may shine out, and the true bird be known from the base. Let it please you to permit your servant to remain unknown for the present. Confide in his word—on his oath, that he who has craved thy aid is neither mean nor unworthy, and let that suffice until more prosperous times."

"Be it so—be it so; and welcome, whoever thou mayest be," said the khan, with hearty goodwill, to relieve me from all uneasiness: "but as for that beast of a governor, and his filthy naib, who have eaten dirt enough to choke them if they had been men—the curse of the devil upon them! but they shall meet with their match yet. Happy that you have not killed the fellow, said you?—By the beard of Allee—but all that grieves me is to think you may have only done the business half. Ah! it once was otherwise. We had a better fellow in his place at that same Futehabad;—a brave lad, young as he was. He was no squeezer of purses—no disturber of families—no breeder of contentions—no backbiting slanderer or profligate,

mean, pale-faced minion. No, the good Ismael was a worthy man and a brave soldier ; a staunch friend or a gallant foe, as might be ; but he, they say, is dead—cut off—expanded—thrown to the dogs by this conquering shah of ours, mashallah ! with many another of the best of the land. Well, the end is yet to come : they may get old Tymoor's neck into the noose ; but he will never learn to eat filth after the fashion of the day, nor swear to love and honour those whom he has more reason to hate than to cherish."

Delightful as were these spontaneous and honest praises from the old chief, I still thought it most expedient to conceal my name, although the tears of pleasure filled my eyes. I now took an opportunity of mentioning how I had left my poor slave alone, and doubtless in great anxiety ; and on describing the spot, he instantly despatched a messenger with proper assistance to bring her into camp. Refreshments of every kind were now provided for me ; a bath was administered after the rude fashion of the tribes, by pouring many skinsful of tepid water over me ; while a rough sort of dullauk kneaded and scrubbed me most lustily. A change of raiment was provided, and after all was over, I sat down with the chief and his family to a substantial meal, the chief dish of which was a lamb stuffed with plums and raisins, stewed in a whole mountain of rice.

When we had all feasted heartily, the musicians and bards of the tribe came in with their instruments, and sang many poems and tales founded upon the history, and grandeur, and war-like achievements of the tribe; until my eyes, overcome with the fatigue of many nights' watching, would no longer remain open. Then the chief signed to the party to withdraw, and leaving me in the tent, said, "Stranger and friend, rest here in peace; no one shall enter here except over our dead bodies; on the morrow you shall be master of your own movements—to-night may God protect thee!"

Morning came, after a night of sound rest and cheering visions; nor did it bring with it any abatement of the old chief's warm hospitality. He pressed me to remain with him some time, at least until the danger of pursuit should be past. But when I assured him that more than life, that the fate of my family perhaps, depended on my quickly reaching Mushed, where I had the means of effectual concealment, his urgency gave way.—"It is well," said he;—"surely every man is best judge of his own affairs; and the will of his guest shall always be a law to old Tymoore; for well saith the sage—'Constrain not thy guest, even with the fetters of kindness; but as thou hast welcomed his approach, so speed him on his way, when once the words 'I must depart' have

passed his lips.' And now see, there are two of you, and thy business requires dispatch; so behold, thou shalt be provided with another beast, and six of my young men shall see thee and thy slave well over from these plains into the quiet country beyond the hills. In the Chummune-Chinnaran there are tents of a tribe that are my friends; with them shalt thou lodge this night, and the next day may bring thee easily to Mushed."

Knowing the ground so well as I did, and covetous of dispatch above all things, I could willingly have dispensed with part at least of this well-meant kindness, as I thought it might possibly retard my arrival at Mushed for a few hours. But, besides that, however my own ability might consist with urgent haste, I had to consider the weaker frame of the poor slave and the condition of my already well-tired horse, it would have been too ungracious to accept only such portion of the old chief's frank hospitality as suited me, and reject the rest; and therefore I acquiesced in all his arrangements with thankfulness to Providence, and gratitude to my kind host. So after a comfortable meal to keep up our strength, I found a party of six stout fellows, headed by one of the khan's sons, all ready mounted before the door of the tent, and a horse of his own for myself, in the trappings of which the meerachor had consulted his

master's credit more than the appearance of its intended rider. The khan himself seemed sensible of this incongruity, for he could not help smiling as he looked, first at the toorquoise and silver-mounted irâk (furniture), and then on my homely and tattered figure; and taking his handsome cloak, which I had worn the evening before, he threw it over my shoulders, remarking that there should be some degree of uniformity between the saddle and its burden; nor would he hear of any refusal. Thus accoutred then, I pressed and kissed the old man's hands with an assurance that, if I lived and prospered, he should hear of me. But the chief seizing me in his arms, saluted me with a frank and hearty bughulgeeree,* saying such was the fashion of the tribes with their friends; that he was sure I was an honest fellow, a gallant man, who was well worth all the little kindness I had put it in his power to show me. "But I know," added he, "you must be impatient, so Berô, be off; and may God protect thee!"—"May your house always flourish!—may your favour never diminish!" said I; and mounting, I rode away accompanied by my gallant escort, who with their long spears, caracoled and curveted around in their impatient glee; and followed by poor Sitara mounted on my yaboo, staring around in astonishment at this sudden change in my affairs.

* Embracing and kissing each cheek three times.

We rode along at a good travelling rate, avoiding the highways, and taking mountain roads, or skirting hills where there was least probability of interruption; my escort amusing themselves occasionally with an escapade to the right or to the left, as a bit of fine turf tempted them to run a maidaun, or throw the jereed at one another; and they would charge with their long spears, and flourish them in each others' faces so close and furiously, that a stranger would have shuddered in amazement at their seeming danger. But from me, who well knew every sleight of the weapon, it called forth but a slight smile of applause; for I thought of the thousand gallant horsemen whom I had so often seen performing the same feats in all the brilliance of splendid military array.

"The friend of my father smiles," said the young man, who watched my looks as he rode by my side; "and the young men are glad to please him: he knows the exercises and customs of war?"—"He does," replied I, "and he loves to see these gallant youths show off the spirit of their horses and their own skill.—Why does not their leader join them?"—"Ah!" replied he, "it is my duty to attend upon our guest; but if it be the pleasure of that guest to see me play, I am ready:" and taking my smile for consent, the impatient boy darted away like an arrow from my side, and dashed into the full spirit of the exhilarating exercise. "Ah!"

said he, as breathing hard, after a while, he came back at full gallop, and reined up his snorting panting horse by my side, “a maidaun or two does a horse good upon a journey ; it sets his blood in motion, and stirs his spirits up.”—“Your horse, khan, requires but little stirring up,” said I ; “he is a gallant beast, and suits his rider well.”—“He is not bad,” replied the youth, his dark eyes sparkling with delight as he stroked the arching neck, as smooth as silk, and as hard as marble, from the high condition of the animal. “My father had him a colt from a party of Tekehs ; they had just taken him in a chappow from the Goklans ; he gave ten Khorasanee tomauns and a good matchlock for him, and all for me his son.—But he is worth it all.—I hope we may have a brush with these fellows next spring, and then I will try his metal.”

I could not help smiling again, as the handsome youth, whose beard hardly showed upon his chin, thus poured out the fulness of his heart to an utter stranger. My own early days, and those of my beloved Selim rose before me, and the smile gave way to a sigh :—thus, thought I, is it ever with youth, when the heart is fresh and the spirit buoyant, and the eye sparkles with that light which tinges all earthly objects with the hues of Ghinnestan !—All then is glowing anticipation—exulting, bounding delight. The pang of disap-

pointed hope has not then sickened the soul; the blight of coldness and ingratitude has not chilled the heart; nor have the affections been yet seared by schemes of calculating self-interest or reckless ambition. But, alas! these things will come: the tree must bend or break before the storm; the steel must be tempered into hardness before it can protect its wearer; and these warm gushing affections must be chilled by caution for the uses of life. The spring of that eager enthusiastic spirit, if the body which contains it endure yet twenty summers, will be broken by misfortune, or must submit to change its tone, to suit the cold, heartless, and faithless world around it!

Resting for an hour at mid-day under the shade of some overhanging rocks, we refreshed ourselves and fed our horses; and then pursuing our journey, before the fourth hour in the afternoon we came in sight of the black tents at which our journey was to cease for the night.

Our reception here afforded a good specimen of the primitive hospitality of the tribes. The young khan, our guide, riding up to the tent of the principal person of the aoul, gave the salutation of peace, which was answered with alacrity in the usual form, and followed by many cordial inquiries concerning the health of his friend Sooltaun Tymoor, by Kara Mahomed, the chief man of the encampment: to these the youth answered in

courteous phrase, repeating the same inquiries on his father's part for the welfare of his friend Kara Mahomed, after which he continued :—"Sooltaun Tymoor sends thee greeting by my mouth, and desires that for the friendship which is between thee and him, and for the hospitality of the tribes of these mountains and plains, thou wilt receive this stranger whom I bring thee, frankly, and entreat him kindly as my father has done, for the time he may sojourn in thy tents ; and when he shall seek to depart, let him be forwarded upon his journey hence as he has been from our tents to thine ; nor shalt thou crave his name nor business ; for he has claimed the asylum of the stable from my father, who finds him worthy, and thou mayest trust to his honour. His present destination is the holy city, to which thou wilt give him safe conduct and conveyance. So may thy house abide in prosperity, and thy face be white, and thy name honoured among thy kindred and the tribes of Iraun !"—" Bash-ustun !—upon my head be it !" replied Kara Mahomed, a man whose name suited well with his personal appearance ; for he was a swarthy, large, rawboned man, with somewhat of a gloomy character of countenance ; but the gloom disappeared at this address, and frankly bidding us welcome, he insisted on the whole party dismounting and tarrying for the night.

This the young man declined, as contrary to his

father's commands, which were, that he should be back at an early hour on the morrow ; but they all remained to partake of a feast, which was instantly ordered to be got ready. Accordingly, after due time we all sat down to a grand smoking pillaw of sheep's flesh, and rice, and a lamb, that favourite dish, stewed whole, with fruits and spices. Aub-e-goosh (or soup) thickened with barley meal, a mess of eggs and onions, with sweetmeats and several other delicacies of rare occurrence, were added by the women, who prided themselves probably on doing extraordinary honour to their guests. Nor was the excellent sherbet of buttermilk and of grape vinegar wanting ; and cheese, butter, and all the produce of cattle in use among the tribes, were in full profusion.

During all the time we were discussing these substantial good things, and afterwards, when smoking the calleeoons with the comfort of men satisfied with food, the young khan and I were forced by Kara Mahomed to assume the place of honour. But while he pressed us to eat of the best, and conversed with us upon every subject of interest he could think of to amuse his guests, not a single allusion was made to me or to my business, beyond what might seem necessary to forward it. And before the young khan and his party rose to depart, some two hours short of midnight, it was arranged that I should be per-

mitted to depart an hour before day, escorted by a party from the aoul, till within sight of the village of Khoosmeitee, from whence a single attendant should alone proceed, to carry back the horse on which I was to ride to Mushed.

Scarcely do I remember an event of my life in which the ruling influence of propitious destiny was more conspicuous than in the incidents of this journey; and often have I reflected on them with astonishment as well as with gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of all things. The fortunate conjuncture at which I reached the village, the unlooked-for assistance of the poor slave, with the whole occurrences of that eventful night, were all providentially favourable; but in nothing was this influence more remarkably displayed than in the impulse which led me to throw myself upon the hospitality of the Eeliaut chief. Had I adhered to my first intention, and restricted my request to the food I required, suspicion might have been roused, the generous and warm protector might have been converted into a jealous enemy; and an evil impression once given, might have terminated by landing me in a prison at Mushed. But a frank, open appeal to the heart and its better feelings is a mode of approach which few possessing such feelings can resist; and a candid avowal of difficulty or of error I have at all times found more likely to ensure a favourable impression than

the most specious misrepresentations or excuses. In the present case such a line of conduct proved the means of creating numerous and powerful friends in the hour of my greatest need, and of enabling me to pass through all the dangers of a very perilous journey in comfort and security.

The gloomy, but to me hospitable and kind Kara Mahomed, failed not to present himself at the early hour of my departure, to bestow the departing blessings of a kind host, and receive those of a grateful guest: and leaving his black tents, in due time we reached the place where my escort was to part from me. It then became expedient to consider where I should deposit my slave, and how I might myself best avoid the dangers which the city presented; for prudence suggested that it would be wise to avoid an incautious or immediate return to the hovel where I had left my brother-in-law. Besides, why torment him with an imperfect tale? was it not better to spend another hour in completing my information, and returning to cheer his heart perhaps with the full and perfect assurance of happiness? To effect this it was important to discover the agent of Meerza Aboo Talib in Mushed, for that he had one I doubted not; and the anxiety which I felt to ascertain this point resolved me; an irresistible impulse disposed me to this course. The whole of this journey had been conducted

upon impulse; and its results hitherto had been so fortunate, that I determined to abide by the same until its termination.

Having thus concluded, I dismissed the guide along with the horse upon which I rode, with many thanks—all that I had to offer, all that he would have received,—about half a fursung distant from the walls, and leading Sitara with the yaboo across a portion of the rugged ground which surrounds them, I proceeded to the mausoleum of Khaujeh Rubbie, where I knew that certain dervishes of considerable fame and sanctity resided. Selecting one of those, whose appearance was guarantee for his conduct, I solicited his protection for my slave, who was, I told him, a stranger, and intended to perform her vows as a pilgrim at the holy shrine as soon as I should have arranged for our accommodation in the city. The man, though with some surprise, accepted of the trust; and having seen Sitara accommodated decently in a separate cell, I remounted the yaboo and rode straight to the city.

CHAPTER XI.

ELUCIDATIONS.

ENTERING by the durwazeh nô, I rode at once to the outaugh of Hadjee Abdool Kauder, whom I found engaged in business with one or two persons of the same calling. I remarked that the hadjee started as I made my appearance ; but he readily returned my salute of peace, and whispering a few words to an attendant, told me with a significant nod to follow him, and that my business should be attended to.

A little surprised at his manner, but guessing that it was connected with his scruples, I followed the servant. He led me to a small house, which entering, he took charge of the yaboo, and begged me to be seated in a little chamber near the doorway, where he told me his master would soon join me.

In fact, before twenty minutes had elapsed the hadjee made his appearance, and carefully locking

the door, took me into a still more retired apartment, and addressed me with every symptom of caution:—"You are welcome," said he: "I am glad to see you returned; for I began to fear your enterprise might cost you dear. Are you aware that you have been the subject of strict inquiry?—that evil reports are abroad concerning you?" "In truth," replied I, "O hadjee! I am this moment arrived in the city, and consequently have neither heard of the inquiry, nor the reports of which you speak:—of what nature are they, I pray you?"—"Of their nature I am ignorant myself," said the hadjee, "as well as of the origin of the inquiry; but it cannot be for any good purpose, and it is the part of a friend to warn you of it: it must I fear be my last good office. I wish you well, sir; and under other circumstances I might express that good-will more openly; but I have a family and many weighty concerns. I dare not risk their safety by maintaining an open intercourse with any proscribed person."

"I comprehend, hadjee; your fear is but reasonable; and I thank you for your repeated kindness. I will not be the means of injuring your house: may it continue to prosper!—but yet listen to me, I pray you, while I relate to you what occurred to me at Futehabad."

Thereupon I related my whole adventures, not even concealing my unlucky rencounter with the

naib, at which the honest peaceful hadjee shook his head. "Ah! it is this assuredly that has set the hornets' nest in a buzz: it is well if you escape their stings:—but what is your intention next? I have heard of that Meerza Aboo Talib of Is-pahan: he is not now I think a regular trader in these parts; but still he may have occasional dealings; and I think I know his agent: him surely you should see without delay."—"It is my intention so to do: I only wished in the first place to see you, hadjee, to thank you for your kindness; to restore your horse; and to beg your advice in discovering this very person. I will not now intrude any longer."

The hadjee was softened:—"You are all welcome—very welcome," said he, "to any thing I have done for you; I wish more were in my power.—But stay; in this case every delay is dangerous; and, as it is unsafe for you to appear much in the streets, it may be well to send for the meerza's agent to this place." To this arrangement I gratefully assented, and a messenger was accordingly despatched to bring Meerza Jaffeer Allee to the house where we were seated.

It was fortunate for my patience that the meerza was found at home, and able to attend the summons without long delay. He was an old man, slow of apprehension, and of speech, with dim eyes, and an impenetrable countenance. Upon

being informed that his correspondent, Meerza Aboo Talib, was a friend of mine, and that I was desirous of knowing where he then might be, he slowly took out a pair of glasses, wiped, hung them on his large adunc nose, and with the same deliberation turned them upon my face. The examination probably did little to aid his judgment, for it terminated in his gravely informing me that it was not his custom to hold converse on the subject of his correspondents with strangers producing neither letters nor token to entitle them so to do:—if I possessed either, he requested me to produce them, otherwise there was no more to be said.

Unwilling all at once to commit myself, by mentioning my name, I took forth the scroll which I had found in the vessel at Futehabad, and handed it to the old man. The scrutiny which ensued produced more rousing effects. He opened his glassy eyes still wider; held the paper to the light; looked first at it, then at me, and finally inquired where I had found it. “I found it,” I told him, “in a place of which only myself and one other person knew; but my friend, the meerza has doubtless obtained information from that person; for see, here is his private signet, with which you are doubtless acquainted.”—“It is—I am so,” said the old man slowly; “but —” —“But you still doubt;—there was another

of the same description, found in another vessel, in a house of this city; but I have it not upon me; its handwriting and style were the same.”—“Pardon me,” said he, still hesitating, “I may be wrong; but perhaps your name is—”—“Ismael!” said I, abruptly, wearied of the teasing delay, and no longer able to support my cautious reserve.—“What! Ismael Khan Keerkloo, of Karaboulagh?”—“Ay,—he who was all that, but now plain Ismael Keerkloo.”—“Then pardon me, sir, again: you are my good master’s friend; and—but how can I be certain of this?” added the old man, correcting the unguarded admission with his habitual caution.—“I can relieve you, there, meerza,” said Hadjee Abdool Kauder. “I vouch for this being the person in question.”—“Ah! good!” said the meerza; “then, sir, I have a letter for you, inshallah! and I will go and fetch it.”—“A letter!” exclaimed I; “but stay—tell me one thing: know you aught of my family?—where are they?—here, or elsewhere?—safe?—speak!—tell me.”—“Of that, sir, I can tell you little,” replied the old man, with his habitual phlegmatic slowness; “I believe, however, that they are safe, and that my correspondent, the meerza, can tell you something about them, for he was here about two years ago; but his letter perhaps may explain; and my instructions go no further than to deliver it, to supply you with

money, and to assist you where it may be in my power.”—“It is well,” said I, constraining my impatience; “for God’s sake give me that letter!” and the old man shuffled away to fetch it.

“O God!” exclaimed I audibly, when the old meerza was gone, “has the time at last come, then, when my anxieties are to cease, and all I love to be restored to me?”—“Doubt it not, sir,” said the hadjee, touched by my strong emotion, “the clouds are dispersing, and God will give you peace and tranquil happiness after these storms.”—“Amen!” responded I, “and welcome will it be; for severely have they visited me, and much have I suffered from them.”

In due time the meerza returned, and taking from the silken bag, which held it, a letter bearing my address, I hastily tore it open, and read as follows:—

“Dear friend! brother of my soul! health and peace to thee!—Misfortune, like the keen north-east wind, pierceth even unto the bones, drieth up the marrow, and freezeth the heart of man; but friendship, like the early sun of spring, poureth gladness and joy into his soul, and causeth every member to rejoice in its genial heat. Come, then, friend of my soul, to the home of thy brother; come, and tarry not; for those whom thou lovest and mournest as lost shall welcome thee there,

and sorrow shall be turned into joy. To write more is not convenient ; thou art wise, and wilt comprehend ; demand from the bearer of this whatever thou mayest require, he will supply thee. Farewell ; may the Omnipotent have thee ever in his keeping !”

Oh ! how shall I describe my perfect joy at this blessed confirmation of all my most ardent hopes ? I was filled with impatience and delight. How did I rejoice that I had followed my inward monitor’s persuasion, and completed the glad discovery ! for what now remained but to impart it to my beloved brother, and to commence our journey for Ispahan, where I doubted not to find Aboo Talib ? The shades of evening were already falling ; the danger of exposing my person was diminished, and I determined to proceed immediately to the lowly hovel of the old dullauk.

It is a trite but true remark, that the rising man finds ready aid ; while the drowning wretch may sink unregarded. Whether this may arise from a belief, that until the chain of misfortune be broken, all aid is useless ; or from a natural impulse which leads men to assist the successful struggles of those who have long borne up against the tide of misfortune, I shall not take upon me to determine ; nor shall I pause to examine what motive it was that diminished the scruples of the good hadjee, and led him to regard me more fa-

avourably and warmly than before. Certainly the charitable assistance he had bestowed upon me at first was from the impulse of pure benevolence ; and I doubt not that it was from the growing warmth of this feeling that he was led to offer me a more comfortable lodging than I could otherwise have easily procured, in the house to which he had brought me. “ You will not be long in Mushed,” said he, “ and this is a place where you may remain in perfect privacy, provided you do not wilfully expose yourself, until you depart. Remain here, therefore, and bring your brother, if he be able, this very night.” I felt the kindness of the offer, and frankly accepted it, for I knew that a better lodging than the old dullauk’s miserable shed would be essential to the recovery of my brother’s health, and the ultimate attainment of our most important objects.

Having arranged with the meerza to call upon him next day, in order to settle the preparations for our journey, I wrapped myself well up in my cloak, and sped impatiently to the dullauk’s hovel. The prosperous result of my interview with Meerza Jaffeer Allee had removed every sensation of fatigue, and I strode along with the exulting pace of joy. But what happiness in this world is without alloy ?—what joy is unattended by its concomitant sorrow ? When I reached the hovel in which I had left my brother, I found it void,

deserted, tenantless ! The gaping door-way permitted every passer by to see the dilapidated condition of its interior, stripped of even the miserable furniture it could boast of before ; and when I entered, it appeared that the roof had been demolished for the sake of the bits of wood which had formed it.

Aghast at this sight, I quitted the ruin, and staring about for some one to inform me regarding this catastrophe, my eyes chanced to light upon a small druggist's shop at some distance, but in sight of the hovel. To this I went, and inquired if the owner could tell me what had become of the old dullauk.

“ Ah ! is it old Humza you mean ? Poor old wretch ! he is dead.”—“ Dead ?” echoed I, “ how ? when ?—he was alive only six days ago.”—“ May be ; may be ; yet I believe it is four or five days since it happened. They buried him immediately, for his kinsmen were poor enough themselves, I hear, and would go to no great cost about it : in fact they seized upon the poor old wretch's movables before the breath was well out of the body :—the bystanders cried shame upon them.”—“ But he had a lodger, what became of him ?”—“ A lodger ? May be, but I know nothing about the matter.”

“ Holy Prophet preserve my judgment !” exclaimed I involuntarily, with a passionate gesture,

“ what can have become of him ? ” — “ Perhaps *I* can tell you something about him,” said a grave-looking personage, who spoke in a foreign accent, and whose somewhat peculiar costume was chiefly concealed by a dark cloak trimmed with Bokhara lambskin : “ will it please you to describe the person whom you mean ? ” — “ The blessing of Allah be on you ! ” replied I ; and gave the particulars of my brother’s appearance. — “ Follow me then, if you please,” said the stranger, “ and you shall see, as I think, the very person you are interested in ; from this man you can learn nothing more : ” and taking up a parcel of drugs which he had purchased, he quitted the shop, courteously beckoning me to accompany him.

We had not gone a long way when, stopping before a door-way in a high wall, he entered, and ushered me into a little court, at one side of which there was a comfortably furnished apartment. “ Be pleased to be seated,” said the stranger, “ I must visit my guest—my patient, indeed, I must call him ; for I presume you know he is ill ? ” My heart sunk at this intimation, which I took to be the prelude of some fatal communication. “ Ill ?—yes,” said I, “ he was indisposed, I knew ;—but surely not very ill ? ” — “ Ay, very ill,” replied the stranger : “ so ill, that only for the assistance sent him by Providence at a very critical time, he had before now ceased to exist ; but I

hope—"—" Oh! may Allah bless you for that word!" exclaimed I, clasping his hand and carrying it to my forehead: "and may my poor brother yet live!"—" Brother! is it so, then?—but be calm; he is better, but must not be agitated:—wait for me here."

Oh! the agony of that interval! It was only now I truly conceived the danger;—only now had it impressed itself in all its alarming and distracting force upon my heart: the faithful companion, the zealous friend, the chosen brother of my affection, the associate in my weal and woe for many a weary hour, about to be snatched from me; dying even when touching the well-earned reward of all his struggles. What then were all my hopes of happiness,—my own recovered blessings!—wife, children, safety, riches, were almost utterly forgotten in the misery of this present misfortune.

The stranger at last returned.—" You may see him, but, as you value his life, be prudent: agitation would destroy him. Much depends upon the events of this day; for the medicines he has taken have acted beneficially, and the crisis is past: but the weakness which remains, if increased, may undo all the good that has been done."

He led me to an upper chamber, comfortably fitted up; and there, indeed, lay the object of my

anxiety, pale, emaciated, and without motion,—the light of his sunken eyes almost extinguished. Oh, could that be the brave, the gallant, the joyous Noor Mahomed? With clasped hands and indrawn breath I gazed upon his altered features; nor could I persuade myself, for a moment or two, that death had not already set his seal upon them. At last his eyes caught a glimpse of my figure: a slight inquiring contraction of the brow proved that the presence of a stranger had attracted his notice; and the faint succeeding smile which played over his features told as distinctly that his recollection was immediate. It was like a beam of sunshine falling on my heart. “Ah, dear Ismael,” said he faintly, “you have returned then? I feared that I should never have seen you more. I have been very ill; but I am better, I think.”—“Speak not, young man, I pray you,” said the stranger; “and you, sir, be silent, I entreat. Do not check his recovery, or prevent it by exciting him.”—“I will speak no more,” said the invalid: “but let my brother only say he has been successful;—only smile, dearest Ismael, if it has been so: it will do me more good than a whole maun of physic.” I could not refrain from the smile he sought; and I saw a faint flush of joy overspread my brother’s face. “Come, come, sir, this will never do,” said the stranger; “retire with me: have you no curiosity to learn how your

brother came to be here? Please to retire below; I will but administer his cordials, and join you." I did accordingly retire, casting a wistful look at the invalid; and the stranger soon after joining me, gave me the following account:—

"That your brother still lives, sir, is, I repeat, a manifestation of the mercy of the Most High, for which you have good cause to be grateful; for, had assistance been delayed one day longer, it is probable that no earthly skill could have saved his life. It happened just four mornings ago, that in passing through the lane where yon druggist lives, I observed a crowd collected about a hovel; and upon inquiry, I learned that an old man had just been found dead in his bed, and that his relatives were disposing the body for burial. There was nothing in this to attract much notice; and I was just turning away, when some words from the persons around the door of the hovel once more arrested my attention; and upon looking in, I discovered that there was another inhabitant of the miserable dwelling, who appeared to be fast following the old man's steps to the grave, and whom the relatives of the deceased evinced no disposition to treat with humanity or even with decency.

"I soon learned that this was a poor lodger, who had fallen ill in the place; and who, being utterly unable to pay for further accommodation,

or, indeed, to put forth a prayer for assistance or mercy, the savages were going to abandon to his fate in the open roofless hovel. In fact they had already torn away every thing worth carrying off, and were even debating whether or not the tattered quilt which covered him, and the mat on which he lay should not follow the rest. I was shocked at their unfeeling rapacity, and looking at the poor object of their brutality, became still more interested by his appearance, which indicated, as I thought, something beyond the common beggar. At all events he was a man,—a Mussulman, as it seemed,—and it was clearly the duty of the faithful to aid a brother in distress. A few abassees easily procured his removal to this place; but the low fever which had reduced him to the state in which I found him, by the time he was placed in more comfort upon that couch had also rendered him insensible; and the promptest means were required to arrest its progress. I am myself a native of Hindostan, where I studied medicine more for the interest I take in that noble art, than from any views of emolument; and, in addition to the best instruction which that country affords, I had the advantage of being introduced to a learned Frank physician at Bombay, who generously imparted to me many secrets of his practice, and supplied me with medicines of much efficacy, which our eastern druggists know not

how to prepare. Thus I may, without any vain glory, pronounce it to have been a singular interposition of Providence which threw me in your brother's way at so critical a moment; and I am thankful to the Almighty for having made me the instrument of prolonging, if such be his will, the life of a youth, who appears both interesting and worthy."

"And may that Almighty Creator reward you, as he surely will, for your benevolent charity to a noble, but unfortunate youth!" exclaimed I, seizing, in the enthusiasm of my gratitude, the hem of the stranger's garment, which I pressed to my lips.—"Nay, nay, sir, be calm," said he, smiling; "this is going too far: but if you think me worthy of your confidence, you will not perhaps deny me the satisfaction of knowing to whom I have had the good fortune of proving serviceable?"

It was impossible to refuse this satisfaction to a man who had so well earned a right to our confidence; nor could I see any danger, either to my brother or myself, in making him acquainted with our real situation; and there is, besides, a gratification derivable from the sympathy of a benevolent man, which I could not refuse to my own feelings. I therefore gave the hakeem a succinct account of my own story; my career in the army of Nadir, terminating in my disgrace with the shah; together with a sketch of my sister's

and Noor Mahomed's adventures ; and concluded with a description of the bitter disappointment we had sustained on our arrival at Mushed, in the disappearance of our families ; but adding the reason we now had for hoping to recover them in safety.

The remarks of the stranger, whose name as he informed me was Kefayut Khan Hakeem, were those of a worthy and sagacious man, well versed in the ways of the world, but entertaining a perfect detestation of tyranny and rapacity. It was a singular coincidence that he should, as he told me, have been in Dehlee during the whole period of our stay in that capital, and had witnessed all the horrors of the massacre and subsequent pillage : and that, desirous of visiting Persia and Roum,* and of taking that opportunity to perform the hadj to Mecca, he should have accompanied the Persian army on its return from Hindostan, under a promise of protection from Nadir, for whom, when indisposed, he had more than once been called on to prescribe. It appeared too, that my name and the somewhat peculiar circumstances of my disgrace had reached his ears, although in the wide range of so extensive and crowded a camp, we had not to our knowledge ever met. The hakeem, more and more interested in our concerns, and in the recovery

* Turkey,—Constantinople.

and welfare of my brother, and not, I believe, displeased with my own society, insisted upon my taking up my quarters in his house : and I believe that my friend the hadjee, although he was pleased to remonstrate upon the occasion, felt no great objection to this alteration of arrangements.

The certainty that a favourable change had taken place in our affairs, although for some time I did not dare to communicate its extent, produced a powerful effect upon my brother's health and spirits. His recovery, in fact, became so rapid, as to astonish the hakeem ; and after ten days more had elapsed he could no longer oppose my declared intentions of preparing for our journey to Ispahan.

As my brother's strength would not as yet admit of great or sustained exertion, I was forced to provide accordingly ; and, slow as such mode of travelling is, I was glad to make arrangements for accompanying a caravan which was proceeding to the westward, at least as far as Damghaun or Semnaun ; from whence I trusted to being able to push forward with rapidity to Ispahan.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAVEN OF REST.

ON the fifteenth day after my arrival from Futehabad did we accordingly take leave, with many blessings, of the good hakeem; and supplied with suitable equipage and sufficient money, by Meerza Jaffeer Allee, quitted Mushed, full of impatience and the delightful hope of being, in due time, reunited to all upon earth that was most dear to us. Evil fortune seemed to have become weary of persecuting us: the storms were past; our journey was prosperous; and Noor Mahomed's strength had improved so fast upon it, that by the time we reached Lasghird, one stage beyond Semnaun, he declared himself equal to the fatigue of leaving the caravan, and of making long marches to Ispahan.

Leaving therefore the faithful Sitara and our baggage in charge of a respectable merchant of Cashan, to be forwarded from thence, we quitted

the caravan, mounted upon stout horses ; and, accompanied by only two attendants, took the shortest road across the salt desert towards Ispahan ; and such good speed did we make, that in little more than thirty hours we reached Cashan. Here it was necessary to halt for a night to refresh our weary horses ; but, mounting again upon the morrow, we pressed forwards with the augmenting impatience of men who approach the goal of their wishes ; and soon after the following dawn, as we passed the low heights which intervene between Moochacor and Gez, the smoke of the great city, and its lofty minarets and majestic domes, became visible above the morning vapour. Oh ! with what bounding hearts did we view these well-remembered objects !—how eagerly, yet tremblingly, did our souls fly onwards to anticipate the events of the next few hours !—to the longed-for, yet dreaded moment, which must end our doubts, and confirm our happiness or misery ! For, let our most sanguine hopes, our best anticipations have been realised in the preservation of our families, what might not grief and terror, and the anguish of long-deferred hope, have effected on the weaker frames of those beloved objects, when these same torturing emotions had wellnigh subdued even our own firmer natures ? But “ God is merciful ! ” ejacu-

lated I mentally ; “ he will not afflict his creatures of clay beyond what they are able to endure.”

Covered with the dust of many a weary mile, parched with thirst, and sick with agitation of spirit, did we at length reach the gates of Ispahan. And how endless did its rich bazars now appear as we traversed their tedious length to the caravanserai, where I expected to gain some intelligence of my friend ! But the happy influence of our destiny was now prevailing, and fortune seemed resolved to be kind. Among the groupes which occupied the front chambers of the building, used by the merchants as shops or offices, one of the first objects which struck my eye was the composed, yet dignified figure of my friend Meerza Aboo Talib, fuller a little in person, but in other respects unchanged, and scarcely exhibiting in his placid countenance a trace of the lapse of years !

Not so was it with me. Dismounting from my horse, I went forward along with Noor Mahomed, and placing myself full in his view, sought to attract his notice : but so changed had I become in face and figure, by hardship and by time, that his eye fell upon my person without recognition, and then wandered from it as from that of a stranger. A mournful smile passed over my face ; and I named his name. Starting at the sound,

he turned again, and his eye caught mine : but it was no longer the vacant glance of indifference that beamed upon my face ; he knew the voice ; the truth flashed upon him, and the next moment he was in my arms. His sober, grave demeanour was all forgotten ; and he clasped me to his breast like a long-lost mistress. It was a delightful moment, but a very unfit place for such recognitions, and he hastily withdrew me into his own inner chamber, where we could give vent to our feelings without restraint.

But in the stern age of manhood, when the hours of enthusiasm are past, such indulgences of the feelings are short ; and speedily recovering ourselves, we set more calmly down to gaze upon each other.—“ And is this truly Ismael ? ” said Aboo Talib, at length, half smiling, and half mournfully ;—“ is this the handsome beardless youth, the reckless gay gallant, who dreamt of little else than the glories and the pleasures of existence, in days of yore at Mushed, but whose heart was always warmer even than his head ? Can this weather-beaten, deep-seamed, serious, well-bearded face, belong to the careless and light-hearted boy, who once saved the poor meerza’s life from the gripe of the vultures who had clutched him ? Let me hear his voice once more ;—let it convince me of this wondrous change ! ”

“ Ay, friend,” replied I, “ it is the same—the same hot-headed fool, and inconsiderate dissipated rake, whom your wisdom tried so hard to reform ; and whose course would probably have soon been cut short, had it not been for some sharp lessons of which your gravity may remember. These are changes which sooner or later come to us all : on me, both in person and in circumstances, they have wrought with some severity—ay, and in mind too ; but not in heart, my friend—not in gratitude or affection to thee. Oh, may there be no worse changes or misfortunes to deplore, than those which have already weighed on us so heavily !—I dread to ask a question—”

“ It needs not, my friend, for I will anticipate your wishes :—all is well here : changes you may indeed perceive, for grief and almost hopeless anguish have been busy ; but they are only such changes as have affected yourself :—in plain terms, your wife and family are well—*all* well ; and I, bless God, for your sake, that it is in my power to tell you so.”—“ Alhumdulillah ! Alhumdulillah ! Praise be to the Almighty !” ejaculated I, scarce audibly, for my heart was full, and I could say no more.—“ But there are more than me who have cause for gratitude, meerza ; behold my excellent brother, who also owes you a second life :—this is Noor Mahomed, the husband of my sis-

ter:" and there needed no more to one who had preserved that sister, and who had now received her husband like another brother.

"And now, friend, forgive the impatience of husbands—of fathers: we would see these objects of our love which your zeal has preserved to us."—"And you shall see them; but be prudent: remember surprises, even joyful ones, may be dangerous. Suffer a little preparation; for remember that this is the first intimation we have had even of your existence."

"You may be right, my friend; but in the name of God let it be done immediately! We are jealous of time; too much has already been lost:—inform us where they are."—"Not far from hence," said the meerza, "at my house; or rather in a separate dwelling communicating with my own. My wife is their constant companion, and they love each other like sisters. Zulfah is indeed more lively than your pensive Shireen; but your sister has a spirit that would support them all; and yet so feeling, so affectionate! To say the truth, however, I know these ladies rather by the report of my own wife than from any personal acquaintance; for you will readily believe me when I tell you that I have been to the full as scrupulous in all requisite intercourse with them as had they been under your own charge and care: in my

presence they have always been veiled :—but come, let us proceed to my house.”

No sooner were we seated in the meerza's khelwut than he left us to prepare our families for the joyful surprise which awaited them. But it is not always that the actions of others can be regulated by our own prudence ; and there is a magical expansive odour in good tidings, which is apt to exhale and fly about most unaccountably, however carefully we seek to confine it. Scarce had we reached the house before some obscure rumour was conveyed to the underoon, which set it in a ferment. Even where we were seated we could hear female exclamations and the pattering about of many female feet ; and the meerza soon returned, lifting up his hands in despair at his defeated precautions. “ Strange beings, women, my friend ! ” said he : “ it is all over ; but the mischief is less than I dreaded : excess of joy is bearable it seems. Enter then, and complete the happiness your arrival has brought with it.”

Dizzy and sick with agitation, I saw not where they led me, until the opening of a door and the lifting of a curtain apprised me that I had reached the room. A mist overspread my eyes. I remember the figure of a woman seated upon a carpet, with some children about her. I recollect a shriek of joy and the clasping of arms around my neck : but I re-

member no more ; for excitement and fatigue were too much for me : my brain reeled, and I fainted.

The swoon, however, was but momentary. I looked up, and saw hanging over me, with looks in which joy and apprehension were still blended, the countenance of my own faithful and dear Shireen ; changed indeed, and faded from its bloom, for care and sorrow had worn deep traces in her cheeks ; her eye was sunk, and her visage pale and emaciated ; but still it beamed upon me with the love and tenderness of early days ; and that one glance assured me of what I never doubted, that in heart and soul she was unaltered and the same. A little boy clung to the skirts of her garment : a lovely girl and two beautiful boys of more advanced years stood grouped together near her, in attitudes of surprise and concern.

The mild eyes of Shireen met mine as they opened, and the beam of delight revived in them. "Ismael ! Ismael ! at last then thou art restored to me !" exclaimed she, as she met my ardent embrace. But to dwell upon such scenes is neither fitting nor convenient : it is sufficient to say I was repaid for all my toils, and forgot all my misfortunes !

"But how, in the name of Allah ! did it happen that you were so opportunely on the spot to assist these helpless ones ?" said I to the meerza, after

the first flush of agitation and joy was past, and my brother and myself were snugly seated with him in his khelwut. "Your passion for travelling has, as I think, abated; and there can be no motive for your visiting Mushed, surely, like that which was the means of bringing us first acquainted there."

"You are right, indeed," replied the meerza, smiling: "I seldom travel now; and my journey to Mushed, although it proved the means of fulfilling the inscrutable purposes of Providence, originated in nothing either miraculous or extraordinary. The recovery of a large parcel of goods, seized, as I understood, by order of the governor of Khorasan, joined to some objects of lesser consequence, led me to the holy city. Doubtless it was the recollection of those early days, and of the hours which had been passed in your society there, which gave a colour to my nightly visions; for nothing could I dream of but Ismael, as I then remembered him, young, brave, ardent, and so buoyant in spirit!

"Some time had elapsed, and my business was drawing to a close, when one day passing down the lane in which your house stood, although little was I then aware of that fact, I remarked a party of the prince's officers and attendants proceeding evidently upon some official duty. Such occurrences had unfortunately become too common in

Mushed to occasion any powerful sensation ; but, I know not how it was, observing them to halt at the door of a house, I was induced to inquire at one of the gazing crowd if he could inform me whose dwelling it might be that was about to be so visited. The reply electrified me ; for it described you so well by name, character, rank, and occupation, that not a doubt was left upon my mind of your being the person whose family and property were about to suffer.

“ Absent, and at a distance from your family, as I knew you to be, I could not imagine what so threatening a visit could mean ; but well acquainted with the talisman which has so magical an operation on all such slaves of a despot, I made no hesitation in applying it, and contrived by its means to transmute a most gruff rascal of a nas-sakchee into a mighty civil person : and he informed me that Ismael Khan having been disgraced and driven from the army, denuded of his governments, offices, and commands, and his goods being confiscated to the crown, the prince was of opinion that the sentence could not be considered as completed without care being taken that all his property in Mushed and in Karaboulagh should follow the fate of that which had been seized in the camp ; and that his family, like those of others in like situations, should be turned adrift, or given up, if they were worth it, to the officers of the

crown, as a reward for their zeal in performing this duty.

“It was not without difficulty that I constrained myself while listening to his account ; but I have lived to know that restraint upon the impulses of feeling, as well as of passion, is important for those who desire to succeed in life. To save your family at any expense was, you may believe, my instant resolution ; but it was no easy matter to determine, in a moment, how that might best be effected. While the nassakchees and furoshes were making their way into the premises, which they did with very little ceremony, I questioned their leader as to his knowledge of this Ismael Khan, whose family and property were to be so uncere- moniously devoted to destruction. The nas- sakchee acknowledged that he was a brave soldier, and an officer generally esteemed ; a great favourite with the shah ; and that every one was much sur- prised to hear of his disgrace. ‘I should as soon,’ said he, ‘have expected to hear of Thama- seb Khan Jalloyer getting into a scrape.’

“‘Well, then,’ said I, ‘may not this work be somewhat premature ?—may not the shah relent, do you think, and receive this Ismael Khan into favour again ? And if he does, I suspect he will scarcely thank you for such precipitation.’—‘It is all very true,’ replied the nassakchee ; ‘but, *che me kunum* ?—what can I do ?—it is not my

business. I only obey the prince's orders.'—
'I'll tell you what to do,' said I: 'you seem an honest, good-natured fellow' (a gruffer looking dog, by the way, I never saw); 'the khan can have no young daughters fit for the prince's harem; and as for married women, what cares he about them, you know? Let the house and furniture go to the devil or to the prince; but let the poor family alone. I will take them off your hands, and pay you well for them. You will then have credit with the prince for having done your duty; you will have a good friend in the khan, if he should come into favour again; and gain a good lump of money into the bargain.—What say you?'

"By this time the cries of the women began to be heard. 'If these ladies are insulted,' said I, 'our bargain is at an end. If they are delivered to me with their veils on, untouched and unseen, with all the children, I give you so much in hard cash.' Another cry or two quickened the man's decision. 'Chushm!' said he, 'be it so; 'I shall send for the tucht-e-rowans,* as if they were wanted to convey the women to the prince's harem, and they shall follow your orders:—but when am I to have the money? for by the head of Allee, if you think to cheat me, you had better burn your father!'—'Let the tucht-e-rowans accompany me; and let any one you can

* Litters.

depend upon go along with them:—he shall bring you the money.’—‘ Good,’ replied he ; ‘ and now let us see about the women, for my fellows are something of the roughest, and none of the slowest neither.’

“ In we went, and it was full time ; for so expert were these fulfillers of the law, or rather of the prince’s pleasure, that scarce a rag or an utensil remained in its place. Every thing was stript bare ; and the ladies and children, huddled trembling into an inner room, were every moment expecting to feel the rough grasp of the brutal furoshes. At that moment the appearance of the nassakchee, although little calculated to quiet their alarms, was the signal of safety. ‘ So ! ladies,’ exclaimed his rough voice, ‘ fear nothing ; —calm yourselves ; no evil shall befall you. Here, you fellows ! turn out,—let alone this room until the ladies have quitted it. Respect the property of the prince.’

“ A shriek burst from all the females at this fearful annunciation ; but stepping up to them myself, I begged them to tranquillise their terrors, for that so far from going to the prince’s harem, the nassakchee’s words were but a blind to his men. ‘ A friend of Ismael Khan’s watches over you,’ I continued ; ‘ and the litters are at hand which will convey you to an asylum where you shall rest in peace until he comes to claim you.’

“ By the time the litters came the business was over. The house, stripped of every thing, looked like a ruin ; even of the ladies’ apparel scarcely a shred was saved ; so that the nassakchee himself was enabled to convey my charges to my lodgings, and receive with his own hands his stipulated reward. ‘ Ay,’ said he as he clutched the gold, ‘ this is what I call punctuality in business ;—give with one hand and take with the other :—no credit for me.—Well, you are an honest gentleman, and I care not how often we deal.’ Oh, how willingly—how thankfully was the money paid ! and how rejoiced was I to see him and his litters move off, well satisfied with his day’s work !

“ You may believe that it cost me no small pains to soothe your wife and sister, and to dispose them to resignation under their misfortune. But the evil they had escaped was so terrible, that their distress was greatly lost in gratitude and thankfulness. Deep anxiety and misery for the dubious fate of their husbands, it is true, tormented them ; but I made it my business to cherish every hope, and represented that the reports of evil news are always exaggerated, and that doubtless the two brave brothers would speedily return in the renewed favour and good report of their noble master.

“ Their experience of my conduct soon estab-

lished a confidence in my integrity; and your wife was induced to request my aid in arranging some matters connected with her husband's interest. It was then, that considering the chance of almost certain loss, unless immediate steps were taken to prevent it, she confided to me the secrets of the various valuable deposits, which you, Ismael, had made, and which I resolved to attempt recovering, in order to add to the property which I already held in trust for you. The condition of your pillaged house, deserted, and almost ruinous, presented no obstacle to recovering the money buried there. But, desirous of affording you some hope, I left in its room a paper containing such a clue, as, in case of your coming to the spot, might lead you to seek a solution of your difficulties from me or from my agents; but not of a nature so explicit as to afford to any stranger the means of tracing me or your rescued families.

“To gain possession of the deposit in your castle at Futehabad was a more difficult and hazardous matter; but I succeeded in it by means of a little address: and, believing that it was more remote from the chances of discovery by others than the position of your town deposit, I wrote what I meant to be a plainer intimation of my interference in your affairs, and deposited the scroll in place of the abstracted gold. Of the acknow-

ledgments for money lent which you left with your wife, only one was preserved; and it was honestly paid. To have attempted recovering the remainder without vouchers or witnesses would certainly have been useless, and might have been dangerous; the money therefore was abandoned; and we contented ourselves with our partial success.

“ But the residence of a rapacious and arbitrary prince was not a fitting sojourn for a peaceful merchant, with a charge so precious as that which had devolved upon me. My business was speedily brought to a conclusion; and, having left strict injunctions with my agents to spare neither trouble nor expense in obtaining information of your fate, my dear Ismael, I joined the first caravan, and transferred the whole of your family, along with myself, in safety to Ispahan, where I was infinitely better able to provide for their protection and comfort. Of my agents in Mushed, one is since dead: the other, an honest, but formal and aged person, has, I fear, rather neglected the urgent instructions I left with him concerning you; but considering the length of time which has elapsed since your misfortune, and the obscure way in which you at last did reach the sacred city, perhaps less blame may be imputable to him than I have been inclined to lay to his charge. Thanks

be to Heaven you are at length restored to us !
Long, long, have we prayed for your approach :—
long has your place been vacant ; and rejoiced,—
truly, heartily rejoiced am I, to see you once
more safe beneath my roof.”

CHAPTER XIII

RESTLESSNESS.

FOR full eighteen months did Noor Mahomed and myself with our families enjoy the perfection of repose and happiness under the hospitable roof of our invaluable friend Meerza Aboo Talib. At one time would that most considerate host, anxious to divert our minds from dwelling on the past, carry us with him to a delightful property and village which he possessed on the plain of Ko-meishah, near the Goombuz-e-shah Reza, where hunting and hawking, and all the amusements of the country were to be enjoyed in perfection. At another, we loitered in the quiet retirement and rich verdure of a garden and eywan,* near Ispahan itself, where cool shady trees and streams of clear water delighted the eye and refreshed the senses. And often, also, did we prefer regaling

* A kind of garden or summer-house.

ourselves with the society of our host and his select friends, in his spacious and comfortable residence within the walls of the capital, or we amused ourselves with the endless variety which that capital proverbially yields.

But pleasure itself will satiate if unpurchased by toil;—the mind will not loosely cast away its habits, as the body does its garments. A life of enervating sloth, however free from care or pain, could not long content those whose days had been spent in energetic action and high excitement. You cannot tame the tiger or the wolf as shepherds train their curs, or hunters their hounds, to do their pleasure : and although to men worn out with misfortunes an interval of repose might be delightful, that ardent love of enterprize and action, which had been nursed in the camp of a conqueror, in marches and in battles, in struggles and in victories for so many years, broke out at last, and before the expiration of a twelvemonth, Noor Mahomed and myself were languishing for the perils and the pleasures of our former animated life.

“ I feared it, and foresaw it,” said the meerza, shaking his head more sadly than reproachfully, when one day I confessed to him my feelings ; “ I never believed that active restless spirit of yours would long remain satisfied with tranquillity. But, after all, what is it you would propose, my friend ?

—What can you do?—Whither can you go?—The power and the name of your late mighty master fills all the East. Affghanistan is conquered—Balkh, Bockhara and Khawrezm have been subdued. The sultaun of Roum contends no longer; even the khan of Russia is content to withdraw from the dominions of Persia, and to keep the peace towards its indomitable ruler. The armies of Nadir have absorbed every independent chief, as the ocean swallows up the rivers of the earth; and they sweep through the land, crushing down every head that lifts itself but a little:—whither then would you go?—what service would you seek?”

“That, my friend, is my real and only difficulty. I would not offer my sword, where it must be drawn against those with whom I have fought as a brother. And who is there in Iraun whose salt I could choose to accept? In very deed my heart does languish after my former life;—ay, and for my old master; for where, after all, is there one so worthy? Stern, harsh, cruel, sometimes unjust, he may be; but how brave, how exalted, how supereminently gifted! With what majesty and power does his very look quell the proudest of the children of clay, and silence their murmurs! Ay, it is better almost to be smitten by his hand than to bask in the favour of any other chief.

What are they to him?—Dust to the stars of heaven!”

“ Is it possible ?” exclaimed the meerza. “ Does the glory of a military life so blind you then, my friend, to all other considerations, even to self-respect, self-interest, and the welfare of your family, that for its sake you would again expose yourself to insults and outrages such as you have suffered ?”

“ Why, to say the truth, meerza, on cool reflection, I am not disposed to lay the worst of my misfortunes to the charge of Nadir. I know that his creatures are too often officious. The Prince Reza Koolee assuredly acted upon his own authority, and from the impulse of his own unprincipled rapacity: the shah never authorised the cruel extremities under which my family might have suffered. Yet as to hazarding any overture for re-entering the service, I am not mad enough to think of it: let that content you.—But what is to be done ?—Inactive I cannot remain: I should pine to death like the pent-up falcon.”

Conversations of this nature grew more frequent as the time wore on and my impatience increased. It was soon after one of these that, strolling in mere idleness into a caravanserai, frequented by passengers from Yezd, I witnessed the arrival of a cafilah from that city, and among them observed

some persons whom I had known as meerzas or secretaries, attached to certain departments of the army, on its return from Hindostan.

Giving them the salutation of peace, and claiming acquaintance with them as fellow-campaigners, I inquired from whence they had come, and whither they were going?—"You have lately left the army of the king, no doubt:—where may it be at present, and what is his majesty about?"—"Oh, as for the shah and his army, we have long since quitted them. The camp was no longer a place for a man without a sword; and even some of those who wore them had more than enough to do in preserving all the ordinary members of their body. As to the army, they believed it was chiefly employed in repressing disturbances, and quelling the rebellions which were daily breaking out in Khorasan, Balkh, and those border districts. But the shah's temper had become so furious, his dispositions so sanguinary, and his exactions so inordinate, that it was rather matter of wonder the revolt had not become more general, than that it should continue to employ the troops as it did."

I could not suppress a sigh at this melancholy account of my once generous and equitable master; and wondered at the mysterious ways of Providence, which permitted talents of so high an order to become instruments of ruin and misery, rather than of prosperity and happiness to mankind. In re-

ply to my first questions, they informed me that they had just come from Herât, and were upon their way to Baghdad, where they intended to visit the sacred durgahs of Kerbelah and Mushed-Allee; from thence they further proposed to commence their devotional journey, by making the hadj or pilgrimage to Mecca.

The pilgrimage to Mecca! thought I:—and should not every good Mussulman perform this pilgrimage once in his life?—And when can I better do so than now, when my time is only too much at my own disposal, and my health is perfect? Enough! I will accompany these pilgrims; and who can tell what may happen in my absence, or what may cast up in my very path to yield me fitting employment? At all events I shall gratify my love of seeing strange countries, and perform an act of religion which always carries with it a blessing.

I lost no time in communicating this idea to my friend the meerza as well as to my brother-in-law, Noor Mahomed. The former sighed, but had too much discretion to remonstrate. The latter immediately and earnestly solicited permission to accompany me; a proposal by which I was too much gratified to think of resisting. It was from our wives that our project met the most serious opposition. Much as they had suffered during our lengthened absence with the army, and

our perilous adventures after quitting it, there certainly was no room for astonishment at their deprecating the loss of our protection a second time ; nor was even the meerza's generous declaration, that he never would suffer them to have another asylum while he had a house to shelter them, sufficient to pacify their uneasiness. The matter was however resolved upon ; so, having completed the few needful arrangements for leaving home, we once more took leave of our friend and families, and recommenced our travels.

It is not my intention to enter into a detail of the events of this our lengthened pilgrimage, although these might well afford matter for a portly volume. I mean not to describe the mighty Baghdad, once the seat of learning and of power, the mistress of the East, bestriding the silver Tigris, and rich in shrines, mausoleums, and medressahs. The holy shrines of Kerbelah and Nujjiff Allee, with the fair and populous cities of Mosul, Orfa, and Aleppo, together with the rich and far-famed Damascus, its fair spreading plains and its enchanting gardens, shall be passed by me in silence. I shall not dwell upon our long and painful journey through the desert, nor the curious regulations of the prodigious caravan, which, like a mighty army, proceeds periodically from Damascus under its meer-haj, or leader, who,

like a general, directs the movements of this unwieldy body until it reaches its destination.

It will suffice for all present purposes, to say that we arrived, fatigued, but in safety, at the holy cities of Medina and Mecca ; performed with the zeal of good pilgrims and Mussulmans every fitting rite and ceremony of religion ; gave such alms as poor soldiers might afford to the shrines and their khadums ; and then, equally desirous to avoid the toilsome and uninteresting journey homewards by the caravan, as to explore a fresh tract of country, we travelled on to Mokha : from thence, embarking on an Arab vessel bound to Muscat, after much delay and no inconsiderable peril both by water and by land, we reached that barren and scorching place. Soon afterwards, having met with a favourable opportunity, on board of a ship, commanded by a Frank captain, we gladly availed ourselves of it to be set on shore at Bunder Abbassee, where once more we greeted the well-beloved land of fair Iraun, after an absence of nearly two years.

Once upon Persian ground the remainder of our journey did not delay us long. A few days served to refresh us after our toils ; and we then lost no time in reaching the great city, where we found our families and friends in health and comfort : nor had any untoward event occurred during

our absence to disturb their tranquillity. Doubtless such calm and happy repose, through the mercy of Allah, was in no small degree promoted by the pious prayers which we regularly put up during our lengthened pilgrimage; and having made due and liberal distribution of alms, in gratitude for so much of the Almighty favour, we became honoured among our friends with the title of *hadjee*, and obtained no inconsiderable fame in consequence of our long and various travels.

The charms of affection and the enjoyments of friendship, united to the comforts of affluent tranquillity after our long and arduous peregrinations, might possibly have detained Noor Mahomed and myself for some time at Ispahan; but fate had resolved that we should once more resume our share of active duty in this bustling world. Our time for this had come, and an unlooked-for incident, which I will here relate, proved the means of thus changing again the colour of our lives.

The heats of summer had begun to be felt in the city, and many whom business did not detain within its walls had removed to the cooler climate of the mountains around, among the recesses of which, in tents, or small temporary habitations, they enjoyed the fresh air and cool springs which these afford. Noor Mahomed and myself among the rest, unrestrained by business, had taken up

our abode with a few attendants in one of the mountains near the Koh-e-zurd, from whence we made expeditions into the desert vallies among the Buchtiaree mountains, in order to hunt the gour-khu s and antelopes which are there to be found.

As these animals are by far too strong and swift of foot to be overtaken by any single horseman, however well mounted, or by the fleetest dogs which first get sight of them, it is customary when they are discovered feeding in a particular place to send forward parties of huntsmen and dogs to be stationed at the different passes by which they usually escape from the ground. This being done, when those who rouse the game, and who take care to give it a direction towards the points where the relays have been stationed, are exhausted by the rapid burst, the chase is taken up and continued by the fresh huntsmen, until at length the animal is run down and killed. Incredible distances are in this way often traversed by the game and its hunters; the first of whom can know nothing of its fate until the return of their more distant companions, their own horses being for the most part completely out-breathed at an early period of the chase.

One day during an expedition of this nature, a herd of seven gour-khurs having been observed in a small valley about a fursung and a half from our tents, we had directed them to be watched by

persons acquainted with the passes ; for, unless disturbed, they are not apt to quit their favourite feeding-places ; and parties were instantly despatched to the several passes which they were likely to take when alarmed. Being desirous of coming in at the termination of the course, I set off early in the morning to take the advanced position, which I occupied with a brace of fleet Arabian dogs, and two attendants, one of whom was constantly employed in watching the approach of the expected game.

From some cause or other, the first party did not take the field so early as had been intended ; and so long did we wait at our pass, that I concluded the animals had broke by some other way, and was considering whether it might not be well to return towards our quarters before the darkness should render that return uncomfortably hazardous : still, as no messenger had arrived to release me, I was unwilling to quit my post ; and, in fact, just as the sun was sinking in the west, the jeloodar who watched upon the rock above me, gave notice that he could see the chase coming gallantly on, followed by a very straggling train of horsemen.

Instantly mounting, we got upon the ground ; and in less than ten minutes saw five of the hunted animals covered with sweat and dust, and as it seemed, already hard pressed, come sweeping past us over the rising ground, with the speed of the

wind. Behind, at no great distance, followed the panting and worn-out dogs, and still further off, came on the lagging, wearied huntsmen. The moment the animals had taken the right direction we slipped our dogs ; and followed by two servants, off we set at speed, soon distancing the hunt behind us, while our fresh dogs pressed hard upon the haunches of the flying gour-khurs.

But fresh enemies seemed only to inspire them with fresh vigour ; gathering themselves up, as does a horse at speed, when he receives a powerful hint from the lash, and casting a single side-long look at their new pursuers, the creatures launched out afresh, and with outstretched tails and wide-spread nostrils, threw their slender forms and agile limbs at full stretch over the ground ; and but that now and then, as they crossed a gravelly space, the stones and sand were scattered in showers from their hoofs, it might have seemed as if they rather flew than touched the soil with their feet.

Away they skimmed, and away scampered we as close as we could stick behind them, standing forward in our saddles, while far in front our light spears protended, ready to pierce the first unhappy animal which might stumble through fatigue or be pulled down by the dogs ; and thus did miles disappear, and rocks and mountains flew backwards ; and the ground, dim and indistinct, seemed to flit

from beneath us in our rapid course, while our eyes, straining earnestly towards the objects of our pursuit, saw nothing else than them.

While thus wholly intent upon the chase, having distanced my two attendants, the dogs and gour-khurs turned sharp round the corner of a hill, which gave the valley another direction, and following close at their heels, my eyes were attracted to the appearance of a numerous cavalcade, engaged, as it seemed, in a similar pursuit with ourselves. Some ten or fifteen well-mounted horsemen were riding at speed, from the opposite side of the valley, followed at a considerable distance by a still more numerous though less stoutly mounted train.

Eager in pursuit of my own game, I paid them little attention; but their sudden appearance alarming the gour-khurs, caused them to change direction, and off they scoured, turning to the left, followed by the whole of the stranger horsemen. Away we all galloped, helter-skelter; but very soon the greater number began to lag behind, until at length a single horseman and myself were far a-head of the whole field, and not very distant from the wearied animals.

The rapidity of our motion from the first appearance of the gour-khurs until the junction of the strangers in the chase was so prodigious, that although no long time had been expended, the

distance gone was very great; and it was only now, when men, horses, and chase were flagging, that it became evident we should speedily be distanced by the failing light. But what the event of the hunt might have been cannot be said, for it was brought to a speedy conclusion. The stranger's horse in scrambling through a spot where a little rill of water was absorbed by some rough spongy ground, plunged into a hole and snapt one of its fore-legs; and down came man and horse in a moment, rolling over and over for some distance, from the impulse of their onward motion.

The sight of this catastrophe made me instantly pull up. I thought the stranger must be killed; and concerned for the fate of so gallant a cavalier, I sprung from my own panting horse, and ran to the fallen horseman, who lay motionless, stunned, if not dead, upon the ground. Raising him up, and placing him upon a bit of dry turf, I examined his person; no obvious injury had been sustained, for the ground on which he had fallen was soft. I brought a little water from the rill, and sprinkled it upon his face: its freshness appeared to revive him a little; and wiping the dust and mud from his brow, I bathed it in the cool stream.

At length a tremour pervaded his limbs; he stretched out his arms and felt about him, and vision returned gradually to his half-closed eyes. He stared around him with a look of amazement;

fixed his eyes upon me for a few moments with a confused and dubious air; then in accents of rather impatient surprise demanded, "Where, in the devil's name, have we got to now? Who have we here? Hussan! Gholaum Allee! Salour Beg! where are ye all, rascals?"—"Good," replied I; "I am happy to hear you can speak, sir: all is well, I hope; but your attendants have not come up yet: you had outridden them all. But have you no hurt?"—"Hurt? why, I do feel cursedly shook, to be sure; but how?—oh, ay, I remember; but where is my horse? Where are those confounded gour-khurs?"

"Your horse, sir, I fear is past riding now: it is lucky his master has escaped so well: and as for the gour-khurs, they are far enough by this time: they will afford you a fresh chase some other day."—"Ah! gone, the devils! and my horse broken down;—the curse of Allee on them! But may I know to whom I am indebted?" added he, in a tone of somewhat haughty condescension. I told him my name, adding merely that I had been residing for some time at Ispahan; and while he was returning his acknowledgments in much the same tone, I found time to examine the person of my new acquaintance.

His look declared him my junior by several years: his person was tall, well formed, and dignified; and in his handsome and striking, though

somewhat haughty countenance, I remarked a shade of character not unfamiliar to me ; like those casual resemblances which often puzzle the memory, and consist in points so slight or furtive, as to elude detection. His dress was handsome and military ; and his riding cloak of cashmere shawl, richly embroidered, and too gorgeous for the occasion, bore token rather to the wealth and consequence than to the prudence of its owner.

By this time the attendants had approached ; and the air of respect with which one after another, as they rode up, sprung from their horses, and saluted the fallen cavalier, inquiring after the nature of the accident, confirmed the opinion I began to entertain that the stranger must in truth be a man of very high rank. Slightly adverting to the accident which had befallen his horse, he mentioned that to the stranger before them he owed the assistance which had been so opportunely afforded him : “ Ismael,” added he, “ you have not informed us of your rank or employment : but you do not look like a churl ; and be you who you may, we are under obligation to thee. Your dwelling must be distant, and the night is falling ; you must return along with us, and you shall be welcome to the tents of Ibrahim Khan.”

“ Ibrahim !” repeated I, mentally, as a rush of confused thoughts flowed upon my brain, while I bowed in acknowledgment of the proffered

courtesy. But my attention was speedily more powerfully attracted by the words of one of the attendants. "What did I hear?" said he, "can it be possible? Ismael? The voice I know—the person I recognise: and yet how can it be? Ismael Khan Keerkloo is dead, or I would kiss the feet of this stranger, and say it was himself!"—"And who art thou, friend," replied I, "who knows Ismael Keerkloo so well?—methinks thy face is familiar to me; yet when or where I have seen it I cannot remember."—"Ah! my lord," exclaimed the man, seizing the hem of my cloak, which he pressed to his lips, "can I forget my old commander; although well may Ismael Khan forget poor Bucht Allee Gholaum? and yet many a time has Bucht Allee followed you to the field, and many good stout maidaun has he spurred at your hurrah!—and even on that day of evil omen, when the gholaums lost their best officer, was Bucht Allee in the presence. May they burn eternally who ate so much filth as to mislead the shah into doing what he did! But your lordship will be doubly welcome to the shahzadeh,* whom doubtless you remember?"

The truth now flashed upon me in a moment: the name, the vague similitude, the faint recognition, now increased to a strong and decided likeness; the term used by his attendants of shahzadeh or prince, applied frequently to nephews as well

* Born of a king; prince.

as to children of a monarch. All these proclaimed to me that the son of my old and dearly valued patron Ibrahim Khan Zoheir-u-doulut was now before me. I knew he had succeeded to the title and honours of his father, and by command of his royal uncle had assumed that father's name ; but the lapse of nearly sixteen years which had passed over him since I had seen him, together with the failing light and his disordered appearance, had so changed the person of the youth whom I had once so well known, that my failing to recognise him was not to be wondered at. It was with a painful conflict of emotions that I now threw myself before him, and kissed the hand he held forth, and poured blessings upon the son, for the sake of his noble father as well as for his own. " Whatever be the chance which brings Ismael Keerkloo to the feet of the Zoheir-u-doulut," added I, " as his sacred person has escaped uninjured, it cannot be deplored by his servant ; and that the son of my late noble master may have the less cause to regret the event, let his goodness accept the offering of his servant. This horse, which has borne him gallantly through many a hard day's hunting, will bear the khan as bravely in the day of battle against his enemies."

" Kabool,* khan, I accept your gift: may the meeting be propitious !—And now we have only to

* Granted;—I consent;—a word used to express the gracious acceptance of a gift.

regain our tents. Here, some of you! put a ball through the head of poor Rowaneh, my old bay, who lies broken-legged yonder; and give the khan a horse: I will ride his gift. So, bismillah! keep near me, khan!—Salour Beg, lead the way!” and thus we reached the munzil of Ibrahim Khan, who having been charged by the king with the government of Irâk, was on his way to Ispahan, and only lingered among these mountains for the sake of the hunting and coolness they afforded.

“And where, in the Prophet’s name! have you been hiding yourself for so many years, khan?” demanded Ibrahim Khan, when, after reaching the tents, he was seated at his ease, and I had assumed a lower place than I might possibly have done in the presence of his brave and unceremonious father. “Your place has long been empty, I tell you, and your presence required. Know you that my uncle, the shah himself, has more than once mentioned your name, and desired to know whether you were dead or alive?”

My reply to these observations of the prince was of a general nature, remarking that it is not the part of a servant whose face has been blackened by suspicion to approach the presence of his master uncalled; and that whatever might be my faults, it was not my wish to aggravate them, or irritate my sovereign and commander by obtruding the remembrance of them or of my person upon

his notice : that since my disgrace, which had been followed by many other misfortunes, I had performed the hadj, and travelled into many lands, from whence I had not long returned when it was my good fortune to meet with the shah-zadeh.

“ The hadj,” repeated he, with a loud laugh not perfectly free from scorn: “ Mash-allah ! you have done a blessed act: truly you have employed your leisure most creditably. Oh ! the army will be all the better of your reverence : there are few moollahs, and still fewer hadjees among them. To-khodah ! man, you will be quite a peer* among them ! Oh ! you must rejoin without loss of time, and give them the benefit of your society. As for your black face, and all the rest of that stuff,—to the devil with it ! it is just *pooch*. Why, man, don’t you know that court favour is like the sun in a spring day?—the clouds flit over it, and it is dark : the breeze drives them off again ; and lo ! it shines as bright as before. To-day one is up ; to-morrow another ; like the two ends of a swing. In the morning your mouth is filled with sweet-meats: before night your teeth are knocked out by a furosh’s iron-heeled slipper. Never be discouraged by past misfortune. The shower falls and wets your cloak:—well, the sun shines out, and dries it all up again. What !—the hand that

* A saint ; a holy man.

scattered once will open again, be sure of it. The shah loves you; and he will restore you to all your honours, as he has done to Killich Allee Tymoonee, Ahmed Khan Ardelanee, Yar Allee Khan Beyaut, and many another red-cap as proud and as sharply used as you have been for your life. Pshah, man! the king's khelwut would hide the rags of a beggar; and the beams of his favour will bleach you as white as snow."

I made but little reply to the somewhat flip-pant talk of the Zoheir-u-doulut; but although I could not entirely chime in with the light tone in which he treated the subject, there were parts of his observations, and those particularly wherein he alluded to the notice with which his majesty had honoured the memory of his old servant, that sunk deeply into my mind. The painful, galling impressions of his harshness, and the unmerited disgrace of my brother and myself, which had so long and so utterly blighted our fortunes, had already begun to yield to the soothing effects of time, and the more grateful recollections of our long and brilliant career in his service—when a smile from that stern but tranquil countenance was like the reviving influence of the early summer sun, and a word of applause from his lips would have recalled us almost from the brink of the grave: and the mere idea that this stern, uncompromising monarch could be disposed to meet

his humbled servant half way in reconciliation, was too flattering to our feelings and dispositions not to be seized upon with avidity, and to produce its full effect.

There are few men of mature experience who can look back upon the joys of their early days, or recall the exulting delight with which they rushed upon their first adventures, without a pang of fascinating, though mournful pleasure; and to me, both the pleasure and the pain of such retrospections were heightened by the hallowed glow of loyalty and gratitude, which still, in spite of every wrong, animated my breast towards him who for so many years had been the steady patron, and the kind indulgent master, of a very wayward, though a zealous youth. And now, that age and the cares of royalty had warped the temper, and somewhat chilled the kindly warmth of that noble heart; when enemies were thickening around him, and friends perhaps falling away, was it generous, was it honourable to stand aloof, because, after long basking in the sunshine, I had at length felt the force of the storm? Surely not. There was something I felt more touching in the evening of such a mind, dimmed as it was by the clouds of misfortune, than even when it blazed in the full glory of meridian prosperity: and to so high a pitch of enthusiasm did I soon work myself up, that I reproached myself for

permitting a selfish emotion of indignation to interfere with what I now was disposed to consider as the dictates of both gratitude and duty.

It is not to be denied that these conclusions were in great measure produced by a growing impatience of the insipid life which circumstances forced me to lead, united to a full sense of the superior interest and keen excitement of that which I had been unwillingly obliged to abandon. Nor was the contrast of my former consequence with my present insignificance, enforced as it now was by the prospect of regaining that lost importance, by any means without its effect upon my mind. The habits of many years had rooted my whole heart and its enjoyments in the stirring pursuits of military life and command; and except in the occasional enjoyment of my family, or the society of a valued friend, I had no great relish for the more peaceful paths of existence; to me they were dull, tedious; and so earnestly did I pant to regain my lost position in public life, that, to confess the truth, considerations both of prudence and of feeling, which at a calmer period would have startled me, were now overlooked or silenced.

Besides all this, I had the example of others to guide me; that specious salve, which reconciles

the conscience to so many inconsistencies and follies. If *they* had overlooked their respective affronts and disgraces, what was there in mine or in me to forbid my doing the same? what was I better than they? It were folly then, and misplaced pride, as well as ingratitude and dereliction of duty, to hesitate any longer: in short, my own mind was made up, and that was enough. With Noor Mahomed, whose sufferings and indignities had been more severe, the struggle was more painful and less immediately decided; but he burned not less than I did to resume the military station from which he had been so unjustly hurled; and being assured that the shah, when aware of his existence, (a fact which our long disappearance had rendered improbable,) would receive him with the smile of favour, he suffered himself to be persuaded, and consented to accompany me once more to rebuild the fallen edifice of our fortunes through the munificence of our former patron.

Such were the motives which induced me to accompany Ibrahim Khan to Ispahan; where Meerza Aboo Talib at first sought to reason with me upon the unwiseness of my intended conduct. Shireen also argued to the same effect; besought me to consider my family; warned me to open my eyes to the folly I was meditating: to rest satis-

fied when I was well off; and never to risk in the service of a capricious tyrant a life which had once been so wonderfully preserved, and which, to that family at least, was of infinite value. But their pleadings were all in vain, for they pleaded against inclination and prejudice, not against calm opinion and sound judgment. Aboo Talib, indeed, was too well acquainted with human nature, and possessed too much delicacy, to urge the point very far. Shireen was not so easily to be silenced; but though her remonstrances were powerful enough to give me pain, they could not shake my resolution.

But although willing to encounter any risk ourselves, we were not quite so imprudent as to dream of exposing our families to the dangers or inconveniences of travelling in times so unquiet, and particularly in the border districts of the empire. We therefore were glad to avail ourselves once more of our steady friend the meerza's kindness, and to leave them at Ispahan under his watchful care. Having therefore effected all our arrangements in the most satisfactory manner, and provided ourselves with equipages suited in some degree to the rank which we hoped, and which Ibrahim Khan encouraged us in hoping would be restored to us, we bade adieu once more to our families and friends, and quitted Ispahan to join

that nobleman in his progress through Irak. This, it was understood, would lead him in due time towards Casveen and Tehraun, and in one of these places it was our hope to have our destiny decided by the voice of the shah himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESTORATION.

THE hope we entertained of joining his majesty in Irak was disappointed by the arrogance of the Osmanlees of Roum, whose audacity in countenancing and supporting the pretensions of that impostor, Seffee Meerza, to the throne of Persia, detained his majesty in the west, where he had already been chastising the Lesghee insurgents of Daghestan. This change of affairs demanded a change of measures ; and accordingly, the Zoheir-u-doulut, with all the forces that could be spared from the eastern and central provinces, were commanded to repair to the royal banners on the banks of the river Koor in Georgia.

Great exertions were accordingly made at this period by every loyal governor and chief, in order to support his majesty with reinforcements of men and supplies of every description ; and never, at any period of his career, was more vigorous co-operation required than at this very juncture ;

for the army assembled by command of the sultaun of Roum was not only numerous, but well appointed ; and its commander, Mahomed Pashah, the seraskier, able and experienced as well as brave. But even nearer to the centre of the empire did strong symptoms of disaffection appear ; and before we had reached Cashan the Zoheir-udoulut was forced to change his direction, taking along with him a considerable body of the troops which he was leading to the camp of the king. The remainder he did me the honour to place under my command, directing me to proceed with all possible expedition to the royal camp, and charging me with dispatches accounting for his own detention.

Thus accredited, we proceeded with confidence towards the point where the royal head-quarters were understood to be established. But by the time we reached the frontier districts intelligence was received that his majesty had advanced against the grand vizier, who had concentrated his immense army near the station of Mouraud tuppeh,—an ominous locality for the Osmanlees ; for it was there, just ten years before, that the star of his majesty's fortune had prevailed against the brave Abdullah Kiuproulee Seraskier, that commander having risked a general action, which terminated in the loss of his own life and the destruction of his army.

At length we reached the royal camp ; and the

bustle which prevailed in every quarter of it, as we threaded its crowded lines; the rapid arrival of reinforcements, and the detachments of parties sent out upon the scout, or destined to occupy important positions in the vicinity; the rumbling of the artillery as it was hurried to different points to suit the arrangements of the contemplated operations; the mustering of fresh troops, and serving out of arms and ammunition; and the constant hammering and noise of tools in the various *kar-khanehs*;* with many other tokens well known to the practised eye and ear, announced with sufficient clearness that the army was upon the eve of a general action: and I blessed the favouring influence of my good star that sent me hither at so critical a moment.

Immediately upon our arrival I led the party which had been intrusted to me by the *Zoheir-udoulut* to the *maidaun* before the royal tents, as used to be the practice on such occasions; and having delivered our charge to the officers on duty, I lost no time in going to the *dur-khaneh*, along with my brother *Noor Mahomed*.

The principal officer on duty at this place, *Mahomed Saleh Khan*, an *Affshar* of my own tribe, received me with an expression of surprise, not unmingled with embarrassment; which, however, diminished a little upon hearing that I was the

* Workshops; arsenals.

bearer of letters from the shah's nephew, a nobleman known to be a favourite with his majesty.

“ You have arrived at a ticklish moment,” said Mahomed Saleh ; “ and I scarce know whether to congratulate or to discourage you. The temper of the shah, by no means ameliorated since you knew him, has within these few weeks sustained some rough-setting, which has given it a sharper edge than usual ; and I could scarcely guess at the possible consequences to you or to others, had not the approaching battle, which he snuffs with the delight that these vultures hovering above us feel for the scent of the carcasses we shall soon prepare for them, in some degree smoothed down its bitter keenness. He has been as fierce as a hungry wolf for this fortnight past.”

“ And to what,” demanded I, “ do you attribute this increase of gall ?”—“ Oh ! what shall I say :—principally to the disordered and evil state of the kingdom, and the constant sources of irritation it generates, grating upon a sore and cankered spirit ; perhaps failing health of body as well as of mind ;—for what human form can stand the fatigue which the shah goes through ?—and of late he has been very ill. But every day there arises some new cause of vexation and anxiety. Only three days ago did news arrive that these infernal children of Satan, the Lesghees of Daghestan, who have cost him more men, and time, and vexation than

all India, Bockhara, and Khaurezm together, and who, not three months ago, had made their humble submission, have broken out again, and plundered and destroyed several villages occupied by Persian troops and colonies, both in the neighbourhood of Derbund and Bâkô. Then these Turks, who have been teasing him for these three years past, prevent his majesty from checking, by his presence, the disorders of Khorasan: and that sorely galls him."

"What!" said I, "the Koords again?"—"Ay, our good and well-beloved friends of Khabooshan and Boojnoord; and then these Yamoot Toorkomans on the side of Khaurezm have all been showing their teeth; but Allee Koolee Khan will do their business, it is to be hoped. Even these cowardly Sheerauzees are threatening again, and they speak of discontents in Seistân."—"By the sword of Allee! then it is not without reason that his majesty becomes displeased and alarmed at the state of his dominions," said I. "He seems to have enough to keep his mind on the alert, were it even more tranquilly disposed than we know it to be."—"Ay, verily has he; and he feels it quite as much as you would imagine," replied Mahomed Saleh. "But nothing touches the shah so sensibly as the desertion of his servants; who, it is very true, disgusted at his harshness, or trembling for their persons and property, frequently

take opportunities of quitting camp, and withdrawing along with them the best of their followers. It is not long since Ahmed Khan Arde-lanee beat his retreat in this way, with five hundred of his stoutest Koords. Then the Koords of Amadia and Bilbâs are all too near to their own mountains; and the boy Khosroo Khan Kulhouree started off with the speed and silence of an arrow the very night after his father was so barbarously punished, and his men have been dropping off ever since. Only yesterday too, notice was received that Jaffer Beg Khan, the Feillee, who had been detached to cut off a foraging party of the Turks, near Kars, had marched homewards, without leave or license, in a directly contrary direction !”

“ By the might of Allah !” said I, “ one would think that the craven birds scented a breaking up of the whole body, when they are taking such premature care of their own precious carcasses !”—

“ No, no,” replied Mahomed Saleh, “ it is not that; it is sheer alarm and disgust combined; and God grant you, and more of us, may not soon find reason to think of a similar line of conduct !—But come,—your arrival is reported at the durbar before this time;—you may as well go in and learn your fate, since you have tempted it.”—

“ Bismillah !” said I, “ let us set forward.”

The space within the serpurdehs before the tent of audience exhibited equal proof of preparation

with those which the other quarters of the camp displayed. Upwards of twenty mootsuddies and meerzas sat busily writing, or listening to the orders they were to transcribe. Officers and gholaums, in the garb of war and travel, were awaiting their dispatches impatiently ;—and darting off with them from the presence, the clang of their chargers was instantly heard departing : others again were as constantly arriving, spent, and travel-stained, to deliver accounts of their respective missions. The general officers in armour and field array stood round with anxious countenances, within the customary and formidable ring of guards and executioners ; and a silent buzz, an earnest though suppressed murmur, reigned among those around this space, which proved how pressing was the business in which they were engaged, while it testified to the profound respect they entertained for the presence in which it was transacted.

In a corner of the tent, a little elevated upon a musnud of dark purple velvet, sat the shah himself, clad much according to his usage in former days, plainly and in armour, with his sword and battle-axe lying upon a cushion before him. I remarked that although his figure was something fuller, or rather more bloated than when I had last seen it, the deeply-furrowed lines of his countenance, the sallow hanging cheek, and less bril-

liant eye, bore testimony not only to the years which had passed over him, but to the cares and severe mental exertion which they had brought along with them. More than six years had elapsed since I had beheld the shah. Double that number would not have accounted for the change I traced in his person: it was one which when once seen could never be forgotten; but an equal alteration in one of less remarkable character would have rendered it unrecognisable.

The change upon myself was probably less decided, or the shah's peculiar faculty of recollecting those whom he had at any time once seen, enabled him to penetrate its disguising effect. His eye, not less keen nor rapid in its movements than when its fire was more bright, caught a glimpse of our figures as we approached to make our obeisance, even before the airuzbeggee had announced us; and mine, though full as quick to perceive the recognition, was yet unable to discover whether the almost imperceptible movement which accompanied that glance might indicate satisfaction or displeasure. His brow did not contract; but neither was there the slightest softening to be detected in the steady gaze of his eye, nor in the firm outline of his mouth. In a moment his look was directed to the business on hand, and for nearly half an hour longer he continued to give it his entire attention; only now and then looking

upwards as some dispatch was read, or some order required of him.

At the end of that time, although there was no lack of fresh arrivals to fill the court before the tent, a glance of his eye was directed to the quarter where we stood, and a slight sign to the airuz-beggee produced an instant order to approach. "Barekillah! thou dog of the Attock!" began the shah, in tones not over-encouraging; "hast thou returned to thy duty? Where mayest thou have been skulking since thou didst slip thy neck from the collar of obedience?—ha!—But hold! we learn, mash-allah! that thou hast turned hadjee. The next step is dervish; the next step is rebel; and we shall soon have thee a delhee-bashee for a surety, leading some troop of madmen for these thrice-blessed Osmanlees, or a herd of asses from the aouls of these Yemoot ghorumsaug;—a glorious and fitting termination to thy pious career!"

"May I be your sacrifice," replied I, with a low obeisance, then crossing my arms upon my girdle, and rearing myself to my full height as I spoke; "whether hadjee, or dervish, or plain Ismael Keerkloo, your slave will never be found in any act of treason against his king, his salt, or his colours; he is now, as ever, your majesty's most faithful subject."

"By the head of the king, marvellous faithful has he been, beyond all question!—roving away to

foreign lands, visiting shrines, and seeing sights ; leaving the shah his master beset by enemies and traitors.—How say you, slave ?” and the king’s tone grew louder. “ Let your slave humbly represent that his absence was by the royal order ; that—” —“ Ho ! is it so ? Our slave was insolent—we rebuked him, and so he deserted his duty ; highly proper doubtless !”—“ Let your majesty pardon his servant, if he state that the royal command was absolute ; it directed the unfortunate slave of the throne to quit the royal camp, and never to appear in the light of that sun which illumines it. And when, broken-hearted and humbled to the dust, that wretched slave would have repaired to his tent, to weep and to prepare for obedience to the royal command, lo ! all was gone, vanished, destroyed—he was naked and helpless. What could he do ? The fountains of beneficence and of life were closed against him :—even to stay and mourn over his ruin was denied :—he could but depart and seek a miserable subsistence in realms where his disgrace and misfortunes were unknown.”

“ Hum !—ably pleaded, doubtless ! It appears then you met with some rough usage ; your companion, we remember, was worse off : the ghorrumsaugs do not often spare the king’s subjects when the clubs are in play, nor lighten the weight of the king’s sentence. But what then ? the royal

power is unbounded—the shah can replace lost goods, and make blackened faces white. Begone! we give you leave; be present at the evening audience, and we may be provided for you.”

It would have amused an indifferent by-stander to observe the sudden revolution which this short interview and dialogue with his majesty produced in the demeanour of the royal attendants and court, chiefs, khans, and nobles. On my approach, previous to the introduction, I detected several of my former friends skulking off to avoid the chance of meeting me as they would have shunned the contact of a dangerous animal; and even in those who did, however slightly, acknowledge my acquaintance, there was a constraint, an embarrassment, resulting from the fear of consequences, which destroyed all appearance of cordiality.

But no sooner had I left the presence than all threatening or doubtful aspects vanished, and these very men, with sundry others, came bustling around, congratulating me upon my return to camp, and on the cheering prospect of reviving fortune that had opened on me: nay, some of the most backward in their first advances were now most pressing in their proffers of immediate accommodation. But declining all others, I readily accepted the invitation of my clansman Mahomed Saleh Khan, to accompany him to his tent, in hopes of making myself, through his means, a little

better acquainted with the general state of affairs in camp before again appearing in the presence.

“Barekillah ! my friends, I congratulate you very heartily,” said the khan, so soon as we had all three seated ourselves upon the carpet of his tent and called for calleeoons : “ I swear by your head that you have succeeded by far better than I had the least hopes of this morning, though I did not wish to play the raven at our first meeting ; but, credit me, it is just your happy destiny. Most people in the same situation would probably have left the royal sahn* without their ears or eyes, ay, or might just as likely have come out heels foremost, with the loss of head or brains. *Een cheh erfhusht?*”—“ But what is this you tell me, khan ? Is such unreasonable summary argument become so common where justice once prevailed ?”—“ Oh, as for justice,” replied the khan with a sneer, “ it is a fine word to use, but a hard thing to find now-a-days ; and as to the frequency of such pleasant hints of the royal notice, I cannot say what a man of your experience, and who is a hadjee to boot, (be it said with respect,) may consider common ; but for us poor soldiers, it is not a comfortable thing to think that three of us, perhaps, may enter the presence, good-looking fellows, with all the usual features and appurtenances of a man, but that it is doubtful whether

* Square before the tent.

two or only one of us shall leave it so provided, for almost to a certainty the three never will. That is what we think quite common enough."

"But, in the name of God! khan," replied I, "instruct me—what can all this mean?—what has brought about this most lamentable turn in the king's disposition, for it was not thus formerly, as you well know? Strict, severe, he was,—a most rigid disciplinarian, and a stern, immovable, but upright judge in criminal affairs; but of wanton, unprovoked cruelty, surely he was seldom if ever guilty—even after we left that accursed Shahjehanabad, which, it is my belief, has by its easy won treasures turned the shah's head, and caused all the mischief."

"Ay," replied Mahomed Saleh, "there your arrow has hit its mark: you have uncovered one, at least, of the true causes of the shah's changed disposition. Every one knows that avarice and over-severity and implacability are the shah's besetting defects. Philosophers and dervishes might add inordinate ambition; but where is the soldier that will allow that to be a vice? Now the plunder and riches of India, so far from glutting the first of these passions, has rather increased it by excessive indulgence, and rendered it so unsatiable, that, although it condescends to lick up the veriest trifles, the wealth of Khosroo,—ay, or the

treasures of Ghinnestan itself, would not satisfy its cravings."

"Thus, after gorging on the wealth of kingdoms, the shah, to pacify this wolvisk voracity, has recourse to private plunder. No one escapes. Commissaries and inspectors have been appointed in every district to register the inhabitants and their presumed property; and taxes both ordinary and extraordinary have been imposed according to this scale, which in many instances is formed at random, or upon the instigations of malice or prejudice; and the collections of these imposts has been so burdensome as to create not only general distress, but extreme discontent."

"Of that," said I, "I am myself a witness; for in Ispahan, Cashan, Casveen, and many of the districts through which we marched, I could hear the murmurs, although I could not judge how far they might be well founded."

"But murmurs and private distress are not the only evil consequences of these exorbitant exactions," resumed Mahomed Saleh: "the cruelties they occasion are terrible. The shah, you have cause to know, pays no regard to persons; so these collectors have orders to spare no one; orders which such arrogant upstarts are but too well inclined to obey to the very letter; and accordingly khans and nobles, chiefs and governors,

merchants and ryots, are beaten and abused at the mercy of an insolent menial crew, who collect often at their own discretion ; and where they owe a grudge, spare no cruelty in paying it home."

"It is a most lamentable state of things, indeed," replied I ; "but are there none around the throne to whom the king's ear is open, and who could tell the truth, and thus merit the nation's gratitude?"—"If such there be," returned the khan with a sardonic smile, "their merit is not publicly known, and its effect is wondrous small. Nor would I recommend you to risk your own reviving favour in any such patriotic attempt: you would surely share the fate of the shepherd who sought to rend his flock from a lion which had broken into the fold, and got his head crushed for his pains, without a whit profiting the sheep."

"Alas!" replied I, "my influence was never to be boasted of ; and now where is it?—I am less than nothing:—a poor half-drowned man, struggling to keep upon the surface and save himself—utterly powerless ! But surely there must be some termination to this vicious system, or total alienation of hearts and general disaffection must ensue."—"It is to that point precisely, or very nearly, that it has come already," said Mahomed Saleh ; "and yet the extraordinary judicial blindness of the shah is such, that he seems to overlook the

peril which springs from such enormities to his own existence; as well as the fact that they defeat the very ends which they are meant to enforce; for, in the end, the efforts of the many directed all to one point, will prevail against those of the few;—individuals will succeed in concealment, to a great extent, however severe the means taken to prevent it; and even the reasonable expenses and supplies for the defence of the state are unwillingly and imperfectly yielded under so oppressive a system. Yet rigid severity does much for the time. I do believe that, were it not for terror at the stern examples which have been made of such as have given public proof of disaffection, the whole kingdom would, ere now, have been in rebellion. Even now, as I have already told you, the outskirts are all in revolt, and require more means than can at present be spared to reduce them to order.”

“ You state melancholy facts,” replied I. — “ What can have become of the acute judgment, the clear-sighted policy, the strict justice which once characterised the counsels of the great Nadir? Do no glimpses of these qualities ever break through the mental cloud to show the shah his danger, and alleviate the sufferings of his subjects?”—“ Whatever portion of these qualities he may have possessed,” replied the khan, “ his conduct affords few traces of them now; all warnings seem rather to increase than dimi-

nish the evil ; his sternness has degenerated into cruelty ; and the justice which you allude to, and which he certainly possessed, has been utterly lost in a savage impatience, a jealousy of evil intent, and a proneness to punish, which sees but a criminal in every one who has the misfortune to be accused."

" But such conduct as you describe is rather that of a madman than of a sane and able, even though a cruel and rapacious monarch," observed I, still more concerned at the tidings.

" And such," replied my informer, " is, in fact, the opinion which is now commonly entertained. Insanity alone can explain the wantonness of cruelty which marks the shah's commands ; and this insanity is, by the best informed people, referred, not only to the effect upon his mind of the cares and anxieties of a disturbed empire, but to that of certain other events which bore with peculiar severity upon his private feelings. With some of these you are no doubt acquainted."

" Pardon me," replied I ; " you know I am as a stranger in the land. I cannot say that I comprehend to what you allude."

" What! have you never heard of the fate of the unfortunate prince Reza Koolee Meerza?"—" It is true," replied I, " that some obscure reports have reached me ; but men are cautious of speaking loudly of the royal acts: they like not to

commit themselves, and little was said about the matter where I have been. I would fain know the truth.”—“ But, doubtless, you have heard of the foul attempt at assassinating the shah, which occurred in Mazunderaun ?”—“ Of that also a very indistinct rumour has reached me.—But how do you connect these events ?”—“ The question shows that you are, indeed, a stranger, and uninformed. Well, listen and be prudent.—I will tell you what is known, and the knowledge may be useful.

“ You are aware, doubtless, that Reza Koolee Meerza, during his father’s absence in India, while exercising his functions as lieutenant-governor over the kingdom, had committed sundry acts of misrule ; evincing a disposition to the full as fierce and uncontrollable as that of the shah himself ; and that, in consequence, he had become an object of jealousy, and even of alarm to his father. His conduct upon occasion of a false alarm of Nadir’s death in India was of a nature not to be forgotten ; and the impressions which his father’s mind had received were calculated to render it more easily assailed by the whispers of the prince’s enemies than might be consistent perhaps with justice or paternal affection. It was doubtless in consequence of this jealousy that the shah, upon his return to Persia, saw fit to retain his son for the most part about his own person,

in order to watch over and check, if required, his supposed spirit of insubordination.

“ With these feelings rankling in his mind, it happened, that as the shah was marching through Mazunderaun, travelling, as you know was formerly his custom, in koork,* attended only by his harem and the eunuchs of his guard, and having his spirits soothed by the music of the female minstrels, a shot was discharged at his sacred person by two ruffians, who had concealed themselves behind a tree for the purpose. The ball, grazing the hand of the king, passed onwards, and striking his horse upon the head, brought both steed and rider to the ground. The ready interposition of the eunuchs prevented the completion of further violence ; indeed the assassins, believing doubtless that they had effected their purpose, fled, and escaped into the thick jungle which skirted the road.

“ The first person who came up was Reza Koolee Meerza himself, who with some of the royal guards went in pursuit upon the track pointed out by the women and eunuchs. But it was in vain : no trace of the assassins was ever discovered ; and although more than one person was seized upon suspicion, some for instance of the Tymoonnee soldiers, who had deserted and were

* Prohibition, or retirement ; alone with his harem.

retaken, and certain of the Abdallee Affghauns in similar circumstances, no proof sufficient to convince the shah's mind that they were the culprits could be adduced ; and they were all dismissed uninjured.

“ To say the truth, the conduct of the shah on this occasion was marked by a calmness and equitable moderation, resembling more his former spirit of justice than any thing that has been witnessed for many years. He expressed himself very indignantly at the officious forwardness of his creatures in arresting innocent persons ; and on one occasion he commanded handsome presents to be made to the sufferers, when dismissing them as guiltless of the charge. The grounds of this acquittal were characteristic of the powerful mind of Nadir, and worthy of his better years.

“ The men, it appears, were dismayed at the thought of appearing before the shah, and terrified at their danger, offered bribes to the persons who took them, in hopes of being permitted to escape unexamined. This fact was represented to his majesty as a convincing proof of their guilt. ‘ Sagacious judges are ye, truly!’ said Nadir : ‘ that circumstance is to me the clearest token of their innocence ; the man who dared to aim at *my* life must be a brave fellow—as brave as myself : he would never have shrunk from the consequences of his act had he been taken : these are

poor timid creatures, on the contrary; incapable of alike conceiving such an attempt, as of enduring its punishment in case of failure. Give them ten to-mauns a-piece, and let them go in peace where they will.' ”

“ Brave ! brave ! by the head of my father ! ” I could not help exclaiming : “ there I can trace the Nadir of my early days—wise, candid, generous, intrepid ! Oh that sordid lust of wealth and dark ignoble jealousy should destroy such a mind ! ”

“ Well may you say so,” replied the khan ; “ but, alas ! the worst is yet to come : the examinations occasioned by this painful event were continued for months ; for though unwilling to punish the innocent, the shah appeared resolved to detect the quarter from whence the danger came. Allah alone can tell whether any dark suspicion had been lurking from the first in his mind ; but will it be credited that some time afterwards Prince Reza Koolee himself was publicly accused of this atrocious and treasonable attempt upon his father’s life ? ”

“ Merciful Allah ! ” exclaimed I indignantly : “ it must have been a vile calumny—as atrocious as the crime of which it accused the prince. Bad as I take him to be, and little cause as I have to love or respect him, I cannot believe he could have imagined such a deed.”

“Why, truly, such was the impression of the whole court,” replied Mahomed Saleh; “they were lost in astonishment and horror. But the prince was too fierce and haughty to be a favourite with many people; and if friends he had, they were cold and timid, for no voice arose to plead his cause. What the exact nature of the evidence adduced against the prince could have been, I never learned; but surely it must have been of the most conclusive description, if we may judge from the result: and in fact it has been asserted that the prince did not deny his guilt. Be that as it may, the shah, after bitterly reproaching his son with his heinous crimes, and pointing out to him that strict justice would have required the sacrifice of his life, informed him that he would remit the severity of this sentence, and only condemn him to be deprived of both his eyes! The prince, it is said, so far from evincing contrition or humility, rather gloried in the wicked attempt, and replied to the remonstrances of his really afflicted although stern father in terms too fierce and indecent to be related, and which provoked an immediate execution of the punishment.”

“La-illah-il-ullah!” exclaimed I, wrung to the heart by this narration; “and is it possible that such a father could have thus mercilessly destroyed such a son, whatever might be his

faults?—Oh, Allah! these are fearful omens—deeds of darkness that forebode ruin!”

“Hush!” replied the khan, “be not you also a raven: our master, unhappy man, has enough of their croaking—he feels it already in his heart. It was during the fit of restless and boding melancholy, which followed this severe, if we must not call it unnatural act, that Nadir sent for his unhappy son. The changed expression of his dark and rayless countenance shook the father’s soul; he spoke to the prince with kindness, and expressed his own distress at the alternative to which he had been forced by his criminal excesses. But the young man’s mind was in no frame to respond to such advances. ‘It is well,’ said he with gloomy calmness, ‘that what is done, is done: the future will speak for itself. But the eyes you have darkened are not those of Reza Koolee—they are those of Persia; and woe be to him who has quenched them!’”

“Soobaun ullah!—Afsoos! afsoos!” exclaimed I, penetrated with grief and astonishment.—“Alas! alas! unhappy prince! let thy faults have been what they may, heavy indeed has been thy punishment, and bitterly will thy father feel its consequences.—Oh, Heaven avert that thy words be prophetic!”

“Oh, truly, Heaven avert it!—but fearfully has that unhappy father already felt their force. From

that day the gloom which sunk upon his countenance has never wholly left it: remorse has embittered his spirit, and in the fits of moody rage which since then so frequently seize upon him, it is dangerous to approach his person, for then the innocent and the offending are equally liable to suffer. It seems as if he felt a savage satisfaction in rendering others as miserable as he is himself.

“ In one of these frenzied paroxysms which occurred not long after the event, he caused every individual who happened to be present when the fatal order for punishment was given to be arrested and brought into the presence. Khans, nobles, officers, guards, and executioners, were dragged before him accordingly; and he upbraided them bitterly with their cowardly timidity and deficiency in loyal devotion for remaining tamely silent when they saw a prince so noble and accomplished in jeopardy. ‘What—’ demanded the furious king, in answer to their humble representations and excuses—¹ what were the lives of a thousand such reptiles as ye are compared with the eyes of Reza Koolee Meerza?’ And almost every one of the whole assembly, amounting to more than fifty persons, suffered some punishment or other: some were actually put to death upon the spot; others were variously mutilated; others again, beaten and disgraced.

Even I, although only in attendance upon guard, did not escape without both blows and bitter abuse.

“Great dissatisfaction ensued, as a matter of course, and many in despair quitted the army, and took refuge among the mountains until the storm should blow over, an event which was not very distant; for when the gloomy fit of remorse was passed, the shah summoned those who were alive and in camp into his presence, restored them to their honours and commands, bestowed dresses of honour, and heaped presents upon them, in hopes doubtless to efface the remembrance of his injustice.”

“Monstrous! monstrous!” cried I; “this is a state of things which cannot long continue: yet, oh, how my heart bleeds when I think upon the awful change in a patron, from whom, until one unlucky day, I have ever received the most uniformly generous and condescending kindness!—But do these ebullitions of blind fury continue as violent and as frequent as ever?”

“No, thank Heaven! they do not: if they did, you probably might have arrived at an empty court, and to serve a deserted monarch; for either he would have slain us all, or we must have fled for our lives. His moods are various now. For months at a time he will scarcely shed a drop of

blood, nor command the sticks to be used: at other times the fiend possesses him, and groans and slaughter are the order of the day. These fluctuations are held to have some sympathy with the state of his bodily health. When the hakeem bashee, Ullawee Khan, had charge of his health and diet, it was incredible how favourable an influence that eminent physician exercised over the shah's temper and dispositions; but since his departure others of less skill and firmness have held the office, and the difference has been visible in the increased frequency of his gloomy fits."

"But, by thy head, O khan! tell me, I entreat thee, what is the general opinion entertained regarding the guilt of Reza Koolee Meerza?—say too what is thine own?"

"*Cheh airuz be kunum,*" replied the khan, shrugging his shoulders; "what would you have me state? who shall dare to hazard an opinion in so delicate and dark a case? How dreadful is it to imagine the prince guilty of a crime so foul!—how horrible to conceive that the shah would destroy his eldest and bravest son without the most positive evidence of his guilt! In the name of Allah! let us leave the matter as it stands. Let the guilty writhe under the stings of conscience: the virtuous and unfortunate will receive their due reward in Paradise!"

“Ameen!” responded I; “so let it be: and now it is fitting we should prepare for appearing at the dur-khaneh.”

We found his majesty engaged as in the morning, in expediting orders and receiving despatches; but his eye was more bright, and it seemed as if the spirit rose above its habitual gloom as the hour of danger and of strife drew nigh: and so in truth it was. The soul of Nadir, naturally scorning all petty occasions and trifling broils, found elbow-room alone in mighty struggles;—in dangers and obstacles which he could grapple with and overthrow.

“Hah, my bird of the desert! who hast snuffed the battle from afar,” said he, beckoning me to approach, when he had some moments’ space to look around him; “are thy shafts fledged from the same wing as of old? and hast thou another boorauk to bear thee as gallantly as in thy beardless days?” There was a tinge of softened feeling in the smile which accompanied these words, which tempered the keen glance of his eye, and betrayed that the mind of the king had in truth fled back to better days, and was rejoicing in the unwonted sunshine of happier thoughts. Its appeal to my heart was irresistible: a gush of warm and grateful emotions overwhelmed me. It was no longer Nadir the cruel and capricious tyrant who sat before me, but Nadir the noble and the

brave, the gracious protector of a friendless orphan. All that I had heard, nay, all that I had felt of harshness or injustice fled from my mind ; his virtues and his august presence alone remained : filled with enthusiasm, I threw myself before him, and touching with my forehead the musnud on which he sat, “ Your majesty,” said I, “ may have many a stouter and a better soldier at this hour than Ismael Keerkloo could ever boast of being in the best of his days ; but there is not one among them who will venture his life more frankly, or spend his blood more freely, than that slave of your majesty is ready to do now, as ever, in the service of his master.”

“ Inshallah ! inshallah ! and the king believes it,” replied his majesty with another gracious smile. “ To-khodah, man, we may not be so young as we were in those hard-working days ; our beards are longer, and our limbs perhaps more stiff ; but we have not quite forgot how to fight, as these dogs of Osmanlees may chance to find ; and thou shalt strike a good blow or two for Nadir Shah, as thou hast many a time done for thy old commander Nadir Koolee : and behold, the means shall not be lacking to bear thyself as thou dost merit in honourable sort.”— At a signal which he now made two khelwuts were brought forth, with suits of mail, and arms all complete and of the finest fabric ; and two

gallant steeds suitably caparisoned, and fit to bear the bravest warrior against his foes, were led into the space before the tents.

“Khans and chiefs!” proclaimed the airuz-beggee with a loud voice, “the shah commands your attention: behold here Ismael Khan Keerkloo, a worthy and faithful servant of the throne, resumes, at his majesty’s command, the honours and appointments which heretofore he held in court and camp, in manner as if he had never quitted them. And there stands Noor Mahomed Khan, another faithful and worthy servant, who equally returns to the honours of his former rank and command. Let the khans come forward, and receive the khelwuts of their office from his majesty’s bounty.”

The ceremony was instantly performed, and we quitted the tent of audience, not only in full enjoyment of our offices and honours, but of all the consideration which royal favour can confer. “And now, khans and chiefs,” said the king as the durbar broke up, “begone to your several charges; to-morrow ye shall meet the enemy; look that ye duly prepare for it.”

The morrow dawned: but long before the light did Nadir arouse him to this his last general action; for never again while he lived did the armies of Iraun encounter those of her enemies in any important engagement. Ten years at least

seemed taken from his age, by the excitement of the impending business; his cheek burned with an unwonted glow, and his eye shone with the same fire which just ten years before had glared destruction upon the ranks of Abdalla Kiuproulee.

Perfectly informed of the large force of the Osmanlees, as well as the military ability of their commander the vizier, his majesty had on the previous evening detached a strong force to take them in the rear, while in front they should become engaged with the advance of our troops.

The pashah's forces were advantageously posted upon the face of a hill, and defended by strong lines of artillery; notwithstanding which, the king had resolved to attack them in their intrenchments. These, however, being at the distance of eight miles from our camp, we had marched a little before daylight to reach the point of attack at an early hour; when, upon attaining to half the way, we discovered that the pashah had abandoned his favourable ground, and leaving a detachment in camp, had advanced a considerable space to give us the meeting.

The shah now himself rode forward to issue the final orders; a powerful body were sent on in advance to oppose the van of the Osmanlees, while he resolved to remain himself with the reserve, in order to secure, or turn the fortune of the day as

might be required. In passing the advance, in which I had a high command, the eye of the shah fell on me as he passed :—" Now is the time, and there is the work, khan," said he : " remember Meh-maudost and Moorchacor :—give not a foot of ground :—you will have the king in your rear :—bismillah !"

And on we dashed, full speed. The well served and well pointed cannon of the Turks made some wide gaps in our ranks before we could reach those who assailed us thus at a distance ; but in a few minutes our rapid approach, scimitar in hand, equalised the chances, and we returned the slaughter tenfold to our enemies. Still the pashah brought up supplies of men, and still fresh batteries poured their destructive hail upon our flanks. The conflict in the centre became dubious for want of men to supply the heavy losses sustained there ; and I had begun to cast some anxious glances behind me in search of the royal standard among the clouds of smoke and dust, when the trampling of a great body of horse advancing from the right, with the Persian war-cry, revived our spirits ; and almost at the same moment we saw the pashah's army melting away from before us ; we could not then tell why :—they had been attacked in the rear by the force detached upon the preceding evening, and could not withstand the unexpected shock. It was the crisis of

the day : a spirited and vigorous charge decided it, driving the Osmanlees back to their intrenchments ; and they left us the field covered with a prodigious number of their dead, mingled with no inconsiderable proportion of our own.

It would be tedious to describe the succession of skirmishes and conflicts which may be said to have protracted the battle of Mouraud tuppeh to a space of several days. It terminated in a complete defeat of the Turks, the abandonment of their camp, and the assassination of their brave commander ; who, together with several other pashahs, were put to death by their turbulent and mutinous soldiers, during the disorder of defeat. This victory, a brilliant, though but a parting flash of Nadir's ancient military glory, enabled him, not only to conclude a favourable peace with the Turks, but produced a very beneficial, although temporary effect upon the turbulent spirits of his own kingdom ; for seeing that the whole force of his arms was now disposable to reduce them one after another, they quietly replaced their necks in the collar of submission, and returned to their duty and allegiance.

CHAPTER XV.

A RENCONTRE.

WHY should the events of the succeeding two years be dwelt upon in detail? What interest or advantage could be found in a succession of ignoble squabbles and petty rebellions, excited by intolerable oppression, and suppressed with unsparing severity; or in a rapid series of wanton and atrocious cruelties, dictated by the insanity of a festered mind, and deluging the land with seas of blood and tears? Let me rather hasten to that concluding catastrophe which changed the destinies of Persia, and with them the fortunes of the humble individual who thus records it.

After a very imperfect attempt at reducing to subjection the indomitable Lesghees of Daghestan, who waited only until his back was turned and his troops withdrawn to burst forth again into fresh revolts, the shah was forced to turn his steps westward to tranquillise if possible the important

province of Khorasan, which from one end to the other was in a blaze. The Abdallees of Herât in particular had openly thrown off the yoke ; and he despatched his nephew Allee Koolee Khan, with such forces as could be spared, to the assistance of his lieutenant Thahmaseb Khan, who had been appointed governor on the eastern frontier. Such however was the jealousy which he entertained of all his officers, and not, as appeared in the sequel, without cause, that he prohibited, in the most positive manner, his nephew and his lieutenant from ever forming a junction of their troops, knowing that in that case their united force would be too formidably and dangerously powerful. In the mean time he prepared to march himself to the eastern provinces ; but, desirous of raising all possible supplies upon his way, he took the cities of Ispahan and of Kermaun in his route :—it was his last, but not the least disastrous visit to these devoted cities.

It is impossible to conceive the horrors which were committed by his order in the former of these cities during the strict and rapacious inquisitions that took place for treasures hidden, or supposed to be concealed. Tortures of every description were applied to all of the merchants who had not had the prudence to avoid the coming storm. Persians, Armenians, Jews, and Christians, suffered equally ; and so many were put to death,

that ghastly pyramids were formed of their heads upon the platforms in front of every mosque in the place.

There can be no doubt that his fury was exasperated by the accounts of fresh revolts which now daily poured in upon him ; and which occasioned the army to be harassed almost intolerably by rapid marches from one point to another. These marches were always tracked in blood ; and the punishments were so barbarous and sweeping, that weakness and terror alone hindered fresh outbreaks the moment the royal troops retired. New and strange modes of death were invented ; men were torn to pieces by savage dogs ; dragged asunder by wild horses ; and that fearful fancy, in mockery termed "the human garden," in which men were planted alive in the earth, as shrubs and trees are in a garden, with all varieties of semi-inhumation, and thus left to perish miserably, too frequently formed the closing scene of a tragedy involving the fate of a whole tribe or village.

It was upon the march to Kermaun that he became aware of the revolt of the province of Seistan, which joined the rebellious Abdallees ; but instead of repairing thither in person, he directed his nephew Allee Koolee Khan to turn a part of his force against them, while he himself should repair, according to his first intention,

towards the northern frontier, now in open rebellion. The unfortunate city of Kermaun, however, did not escape his fury; for, in addition to the atrocities practised at Ispahan, and the pyramids of human heads by which his course might now be almost tracked, he actually exacted several mauns' weight of *eyes* from the miserable inhabitants, in lieu of money short paid by them.

It was during this period of general confusion and discontent, when the remaining faithful servants of the throne were required to rally around it to guard it from hidden treason, or to wield the sword of chastisement against open rebels, that I received the royal command to proceed, in conjunction with Hadjee Beg Khan, to disperse a coalition which had been formed between the kadjers of Ashabad and certain of the Toorkoman tribes. Of these the principal were Tekehs, who having been forcibly removed from the vicinity of Khaurezm to the skirts of the Attock, at the time when the former country had been subdued by Nadir, were not only discontented, but well disposed to avail themselves of the disturbed state of the kingdom to revenge themselves on their oppressors.

A force of five thousand men being therefore placed under our orders, to be augmented as much as possible by recruiting among the loyal tribes, if any such there were upon the route,

we proceeded by hasty marches to enter the district of Diroom through the Dereguz pass.

In marching through the Koordish country, although we suffered no interruption,—our force was too imposing to admit of such attempts—we had abundant cause to know that many tribes of the Koords, and those of Khabooshan in particular, were in a state of actual, if not of declared revolt: our object however being distant, we could only despatch correct intelligence to his majesty of the state of affairs, and proceed upon our business.

At Diroom, where provisions and reinforcements were collected, we ascertained that the combined forces of the enemy against whom we had been sent, aware of our approach, had left the districts of Jorjaun, which they had been pillaging, and retreated into the desert beyond the river Attruck, in hopes of eluding pursuit until strengthened by the junction of other aouls from the neighbourhood of Merve.

Upon this intelligence Hadjee Beg Khan resolved upon immediate pursuit; while, giving me two thousand men, he despatched me, along with my brother-in-law, Noor Mahomed, to prevent the junction of reinforcements, and to cut off all supplies from the eastward.

Accoutred and prepared for the utmost celerity of expedition, we advanced with great rapidity,

although from the heat of the sun and scarcity of water as we penetrated further into the desert, both men and cattle were fast sinking under fatigue. At length we reached a point near which it was ascertained that all reinforcements from the east must pass, in order to form a junction with the main body near the Attruck. In this place there was a low chain of sand hills extending for a considerable distance, with a few points of rock here and there staring from their summits, indicating the origin of their formation ; and here, as evening was drawing on, and the guides had discovered a well or two, it was my intention to halt for a while, and to send out scouts and parties in all directions ; for in the wide expanse of the desert we might just as easily have overshot as fallen short of our enemy's line of march.

Just as the sun was setting, however, the carawuls upon the sandy heights gave notice that a dust-cloud had become visible in the east ; and in a very short space it could be seen by all, glowing red in the last level rays. That this was occasioned by a large body of men or cattle was sufficiently apparent, and strict orders were issued for every man to conceal himself as much as possible beneath the slope of these same sandy hillocks, which luckily intervened ; and not a fire was lighted nor a movement permitted which might

tend to indicate our own position, while we waited to ascertain the direction which should be taken by the dust-cloud in sight.

Its progress was anxiously watched accordingly as it approached, until at length it appeared to become stationary ; and soon afterwards the light entirely failing, we could see no more of it. "Whoever they may be, they are settled for the night," observed one of those around me who had been watching the movement of the hazy telltale. "They will not tarry long there, I will wager," said an old Diroom trooper, well acquainted with the customs of the desert tribes ; and the probabilities of each opinion were warmly discussed. For my own part, I was most inclined to that of the old Diroom soldier, for the fires which they had kindled soon became visible to the look-outs.

"They have grown nice and delicate of late, perhaps, these Tekeh ghorumsaugs," observed he with a sneer, when this circumstance was pointed out to him : "their barley bread and grape jelly must be all done, surely, or their mouths must be watering sorely for a bit of roasted camel's flesh, when they light their fires in such a plain, under their enemies' very beards. No, no, they are no such fools, trust old Aslan ; a sharp trot and a clear munzil-gah* is what they trust in, and that

* Halting-place.

you will find if we beat up their quarters four hours hence." I said little on the occasion, but took my measures promptly.

Two hours only were allowed for food and refreshment, and the word was then given to saddle, load, and mount : there was no artillery, except a few camel zunboorucks,* to encumber us ; and our trifling supplies of ammunition, corn, and water, were carried on stout camels and hardy yaboos. "If these gentry are really halting," I remarked to the officers when we started, "we may chance to give them a surprise : if, as I believe, they have seen, and mean to give us the slip, we shall disappoint them, and either meet, or be fast upon their traces : they must ride well to throw us out."

Mounting accordingly, somewhat less than three hours after sunset we set forward in compact order, the baggage in the rear, protected by a guard, and throwing out flanking parties and single scouts upon all sides, for which, in the wide desert, there was both need and room enough. The fires at the supposed halting-place still glimmered ; and as we approached the spot, occupied as some believed by the enemy, I detached a small party at speed in advance to make observations. They soon came galloping back to tell us that the place was deserted, and the fires burning

* A sort of swivel gun, or wall-piece mounted on camels.

alone. It was what I expected, and confirmed perfectly the old Diroom man's opinion as well as my own. But that they could have gone far was impossible ; and upon searching for a little by the light of a very young moon, we detected the direction of their route by the trampled sand and the articles which they had dropt in their haste as they rode away.

"There are enough of the rascals at least," remarked old Aslan of Diroom, whom I kept by myself as a good sagacious guide : "no fear of our finding traces in plenty to guide us :—to catch the fellows may be a tougher job."—"No fear of catching them," said I, "if the track keeps sure and we ride stoutly. Come, my men, rouse your horses' mettle ; they will fall asleep else. Every officer to his post. Silence, and be steady :—forward !" And on we pressed, urging our horses to the greatest speed that prudence would permit.

But the men whom we pursued were also well mounted, and knew their ground well. Sometimes we thought we could hear the trampling of their horses, and once or twice the advanced party declared they could distinguish the dark mass moving in the uncertain gloom before us. More than once, too, we came upon a camel split up, or with its throat cut ; or a slaughtered yaboo, which having fallen under its load or its rider, had been put to death and left. Indeed the same thing

began now somewhat frequently to occur among ourselves ; and even of the small provision of water and food for the march, some portion had already been of necessity thrown away : but the men kept fresh and in high spirits ; and even of the horses, the greater number, as if animated for the occasion, exerted themselves without the need of whip or spur. Still hour after hour passed on ; and but for the unceasing tokens under foot, we should have, after all, been induced to fear that we had been misled. But soon still more striking pledges of their close vicinity began to show themselves ; for the form of a man might sometimes be detected gasping and outbreathed upon the ground. But there was no pausing either to succour or interrogate him ; and he generally was trodden under foot by our throng, or met a more merciful fate from the spear of the first trooper whose horse stumbled over the body in passing.

The moon was down : star after star arose or set to mark the passing hours, and point the direction of our course, which was nearly to the north-west. In spite of the excitement of the chase, many of the men through weariness were nodding or sleeping upon their horses ; and the animals themselves indicated by frequent stumbling that their senses were not always broad awake. It was not far from dawning, for at this period of the summer dawn breaks early, when the advanced scouts

who had been selected from among the stoutest and most trustworthy of the party, came galloping back to say that beyond doubt a strong body of horse was in our front, and that they seemed to be halting or about to perform some evolution. Instantly passing the word along for all officers to rouse their men and to prepare for action, I rode forward myself, and very soon saw the looming of a large body, darkening the horizon in the grey hazy glimmer which precedes the dawn of a summer morning.

The ground upon which we rode was uneven, not well fitted for a charge. But taking for granted that the enemy's hope was to find us unprepared and in disorder after so long and tiresome a march, and that he relied upon discomfiting us by a sudden attack while in this condition, I resolved to disappoint, and if possible turn his stratagem against himself. Riding back therefore along the column to see that my previous caution had been attended to, I shouted out at once the order to take ground to the right and left, preparatory to a charge. "The enemy is in front, men: charge, and overthrow him!—Throw not away your fire!—Give them the point of the spear, and the edge of the scimitar:—bismillah! set on!—Hurrah for Nadir!" and letting them come up to where I stood, I clapped stirrups to my own horse, and charged along with them.

The result proved that I had calculated justly ; for we met the enemy half way as he came on. But they hearing the shout, and descrying our rapid advance, became sensible of the failure of their own manœuvre, and wavered accordingly : a check was the consequence, which at so critical a moment proved fatal ; for our men, thundering on in full career, fell amongst them with a force which they were unable to resist.

But although the shock was severe, and many fell, the rest by no means gave way under it. Extricating themselves with the activity of practised soldiers, they closed up to the right and left, saluting us with a flight of arrows, which failed not of unhorsing some among us ; and they drew their swords, and wielded their long spears with so much steadiness, that although many still went down under our blows, the rest maintained the fight with a desperation that staggered us, and astonished me. By the fast increasing light I now could remark several persons riding here and there amongst the thickest of the *melée*, encouraging the Toorkomans to stand their ground, and dealing blows around them with an effect which proved them to be worthy soldiers. One of these champions, in particular, conspicuous for a fine war-horse, and a suit of bright armour, with a head-piece of steel, wielded a heavy spike-headed mace of the old fashion of Tooraun with terrible

effect, and I sought to meet and engage this warrior, who appeared to be the life and strength of our opponents; but the current of the fray bore us asunder as often as the attempt was made.

In a little while the first fury of the onset exhausted itself; and, as the light increased, the parties disengaging themselves, took to their carbines and arrows; and the smoke of their fire soon shrouded the turns and eddies of the fight as completely as darkness had done at first. I was now endeavouring to collect my people, in order to make a vigorous charge, when once more I observed the bright-armed warrior riding furiously onwards at the head of a dozen well-mounted horsemen. Calling aloud to some of those who were next me, I galloped forward to intercept his charge; but a wreath of smoke at that moment rolling lazily past, enveloped us, and hid him from my view: nor did I see him again; for in a minute or two a great cry arose among my own troops, and I observed the Toorkomans broken and scattered in every direction, pursued by the best mounted of our men, and leaving the ground behind them thickly sprinkled with dead and wounded.

Our horses and men were too much worn out to admit of a long pursuit; so I caused the signal for mustering to be sounded, and set myself to look around me, and to view the field of battle, as well

as to form some idea of our own loss, and that of our opponents.

The lazy wreaths of smoke and dust set in motion by the charging horses, and the rapid movement of the various bodies of men who were still scouring over the ground, interrupted me in this survey, and confounded my vision so much, that for some time I could distinguish little more than the melancholy objects immediately around me. By degrees my eye caught the gleam of water; we were near a river or a lake—a strange sight in the sandy waste,—and dismounting from my weary horse, I walked towards it. It was a reedy, marshy river, which thus extended itself beneath a green bank. But other objects soon challenged my regards: there was a tree near me—a scathed and ruined tree: few trees are to be seen in the desert, and this was the remains of a noble one. An obscure but thrilling sense of recognition stole across my mind as I approached it. It was the stump of a fine old sycamore, which still threw out a profusion of young shoots, now bright in the full rich green of their summer leaves. The gush of water from beneath it saluted my ear gratefully; the little rill was choked and overgrown with weeds and rank vegetation, among which even yet peeped forth a few tendrils of the vine. Through these it still bubbled, falling over fragments of stone, and brawling over a

little bit of pebbly beach, into the lake below. I started, and my breath came short as I gazed around me. The soft pearly light of morning was now shed over the immense plain. The high bank of rich verdure on which I stood, the green meadows that stretched out widely before me, the lake, the beach, the cool delicious fountain, the old sycamore, I knew, I remembered them all: it was—yes, it was the sweet, the much-loved Chusmah-Jemallee, the home of my youth, the scene of my most blissful days and earliest love, of my happiest hours and most wretched moments; the sacred haunt of innocent childhood, that I had just polluted with blood and slaughter! And whose was the blood?—who were the victims? perhaps those whose kindred had protected that childhood, whose bread I had eaten, and of whose cup I had drank, of whose race had sprung my dearest friend, and the wife of my bosom! Such are the acts of war and conquest! Emotions wholly irrepressible mustered thick about my heart; and, almost suffocated by their force, I threw myself upon the earth beside the pure stream, and covering my face with my hands, sought for relief in tears.

While thus I sat absorbed in poignant emotions, and heedless of the clamour which prevailed around me, a deep groan, like that of some one in agony, arose at a little distance from me. I cannot tell

why, upon a field of battle, where hundreds lay dying and wounded in all directions, the sound of a groan should have moved me so powerfully : perhaps it was the solitude of the place, removed as it was comparatively from the scene of strife ; perhaps it might be the effect of my own previous reflections and softened mood : but so it was, that I started, and, mechanically rising, went to the spot from which it issued. It was the warrior in bright armour, who, wounded to death, had crawled from the throng of the dead, attracted doubtless by the bubbling sound of the stream ; for he lay upon its very brink, only a few yards further up its course, and almost covered from view by the rank herbage. Impressed with a feeling of regret for the fate of one who had borne himself so bravely, I stooped to raise his head, that, if possible, I might relieve his pain ; and as I did so the fastenings of his helmet flew open, and it fell from his head. Oh, God ! shall I ever forget that moment ?—it was the countenance of Selim that met my view !—Yes, changed though they were by years of toil and misery, by the bloody dew in which his eyeballs swam, and by the chilling gripe of approaching death, they were the features of Selim, the friend of my youth, the brother of my affection, the generous preserver of my own unworthy life, who was dying almost by my hand upon the desolated hearth of his father's tent !

My heart, depressed before, now sunk within me; and scarcely had I power to articulate his name. But Selim heard it; and with the keen perception of approaching dissolution, he seemed instantly to catch the tone; for, turning his heavy eyes upon my face, he faintly articulated "Who calls?—I should know that voice."—"Oh, Selim! Almighty God! can this indeed be thee?—and is it thus we meet again? Oh, God! can you not live, if but to bless and pardon thy brother Ismael, who is the accursed cause of thy fate?"

"God of the faithful!" uttered he in low and solemn accents, "I thank thee for this boon: for this only could I have wished to live; and now I am content to die! Ismael, stoop downwards and embrace me once more:—not against thee, dearest brother, can this chance be justly laid: it was my destiny; and neither thou nor I could prevent it. But this deadly thirst—oh! give me water—water from that sweet fountain in which I have so often bathed my boyish limbs when we were young and happy!"

I could not answer him, but I gave him of the cold stream in his own helmet, and bathed his bloody brow in the refreshing liquid. The relief which this procured him revived my hopes, which had been prostrated by his first appearance. "Dear Selim," said I, "where are your hurts?—God is great!—they may not be so severe."—"No, no,

my brother, it is all over with me :—but that deadly faintness is past for a while, and I would fain speak with you a little.”

At that moment the voice of Noor Mahomed was heard calling upon my name in great agitation. “Merciful God! what has happened?—are you hurt?” exclaimed he, coming hastily up. “Be at peace, my friend, I am safe,” said I; “but come hither; here is one whom we must endeavour to relieve. Dearest Selim, this is my brother.—Oh, that the husband of my sister should thus meet the brother of Shireen!”

The countenance of Selim turned to me with an expression of surprise and inquiry; but I heeded it not at the moment; for observing the blood flowing fast from a wound in his bosom, I called upon Noor Mahomed to give me something to bind it with; while in the mean time I loosed the coat of mail, and relieved the wounded man from its weight. “Ay, it is a musket shot,” said he, calmly gazing on the deceitfully minute orifice: “it is fatal too;—not Aboo Sennah himself could do me any good.” —“Oh, say not so, in the name of God!” exclaimed I with a thrill of horror, at the consciousness of the truth which smote upon my soul in spite of my words. “Quick, Noor Mahomed,—he will bleed to death;—not that coarse thing,—something finer—softer;” and Noor Mahomed, who had already thrown off his upper

dress, now impatiently tore his cotton shirt, in order to supply a stanching bandage. "This is better; take this," said he; and seizing the cloth, I turned to apply it to the wounded breast of Selim. But suddenly repulsing me, he turned his eyes with straining eagerness upon the person of Noor Mahomed, who was assisting me in the operation. "Who did you say?—who is this young man?"—"My brother-in-law, Noor Mahomed, my dearest Selim;—the husband of my sister Hoosseinee;—a sister strangely found.—If I could but tell you—"—"But tell me of *him*," said he with increasing earnestness,—"*who is he?*—*who was his father?*"—"Alas! that is what he cannot tell," replied I: "like myself, he was the child of mercy and of charity,—preserved when probably all his family perished; and, like me too, he lived some years in a Toorkoman tent."

"Almighty God!" exclaimed the wounded man, "where do you say he lived?" I shortly satisfied him of all that Noor Mahomed himself knew of his origin. "Oh, Allah! thy hand is in this," uttered Selim in low and solemn accents, after a pause of reflection. "Thou bringest together in death those who in life were separated:—thou joinest the hearts and the hands of brothers on the spot which gave them life;—yea, where one of them must quickly resign it."

His words were to us an enigma, and I began

to dread that approaching death had begun to unsettle his brain. But it was not so. “Ye doubt my words,” said he; “but it is true;—true as that I am a dying man;—behold the token!—see!—look upon his arm!—none but those of our family bear that mark;” and he pointed to Noor Mahomed’s arm, which, laid bare by the act of tearing off his clothes, permitted the head and neck of a horse without a mane* to appear, finely imprinted on the skin. This mark I had more than once observed; but Noor Mahomed himself could give no account of how it came there; and now amazed at Selim’s words, he remained silently gazing by turns upon the dying man, and then upon the mark on his arm.

“Yes, young man,” said Selim, with affectionate solemnity, “look upon me;—embrace for the first and last time your elder brother—the last male remnant of our once large and flourishing family! Ismael, it is the truth: it was the sympathy of nature which worked in you when ye loved this youth so well, for he is the brother of one who loved you as men seldom love. But look to the proof:—here—help to undo this sleeve;—behold the counterpart of that very mark which stands imprinted on his arm!—Does that confirm my words?—But learn also that in the

* There is a breed of horses much valued among the Toorkomans which have scarcely any mane.

very year before you, Ismael, were brought to the tents of my father in this place, his infant son and my full brother was among other plunder carried off by these same Eersanees, whose bitter animosity ye may well remember:—that he whom ye call Noor Mahomed, and who now kneels beside me, is that very child—the little Omar, my heart, failing as it is, declares not less than that token which my father, after a custom of our tribes, did not fail to impress upon all his children.—But, O God! this faintness again!—more water!—more water!” The energy which had supported him for a while now sunk as nature failed: we strove to comfort and assist the dying man; we wiped the cold gathering damps from his forehead, and strove to stanch the blood, which now welled forth in darker but less copious bursts at every sob which shook his frame; but still he spoke in broken sentences. “Ismael,—beloved Ismael, art thou there?—and thou, Omar,—long lost brother,—be near.—Oh, I could have wished, —Ismael,—I fought it to the last:—my poor brave fellows!—I was their father, Ismael,—their only chief hope:—leave not their bodies to the wolves and jackals of the wilderness;—do not let their bones whiten neglected on *this* ground.—Bury them fittingly, Ismael, and let Selim’s burial mound, and the tree that marks the place where he lies, rise beside this well-loved spot.” My

heart was too full for utterance; I could only squeeze his hand: a faint pressure told that he was sensible of my silent promise; and a painful pause ensued. "Ismael, dear Ismael, I see thee not—embrace me once more.—Omar, dear brother, where art thou? Let me feel thee—dark—dark!—Allah-il-ullah!" His limbs shook with a convulsive shudder, then gradually settled into stillness. A heavy murmuring groan escaped the lips; the eye grew dull and glazed; the spirit was gone; and the lifeless corse of the noble and generous Selim alone remained in our arms.

Bitter were the tears we shed, and heavy were our hearts, as we performed the last offices of the faithful to the remains of our friend and brother: but we felt, while bending over the sacred relics, how much the force of our own kindred ties had been strengthened by a discovery so painfully and solemnly attested. But duty now demanded our immediate attention, and commanding a halt for some hours, I resolved at all events to perform the solemn promise I had silently pledged to the dead, and to pay the last tributes to his clay, as was meet for so brave and so noble a warrior. We washed the body reverently in that lake which had so often received the living and active limbs of the joyous and ardent boy; and digging a grave near the old sycamore tree, we buried it after the Toorkoman forms, raising over it a high

mound of earth, and fixing thereon a tall spear-shaft instead of the customary pole. The armour which he wore I took along with me as a last memorial ;—I have it still—peace be to his earthly remains !—they rest in the desert that he loved so well, in the home of his fathers, which he poured his blood to preserve, and surrounded by the gallant remnant of his tribe, which he died in vain to save. Oh may the soul of the brave, the gentle, and the good, find its fitting resting-place with the spirits of the just in Paradise !

The remainder of the slain of both parties were collected and buried separately : the Tekehs in heaps around the mound of their gallant chief, our own men in graves at a little distance. Those duties being performed, and the wounded having received such attention as circumstances permitted, the sound men and cattle were refreshed by a few hours' repose ; after which we left the scene of my childish days, desolated and ruined as it was, for ever, and took a direction calculated to bring our party in contact with that of Hadjee Beg Khan.

It was not long before we fell in with the scouts of that officer ; and soon after forming a junction with him, learned that he had been no less successful than ourselves. He had fallen in with the confederated Kadjers and Tekehs, while dispirited by the non-arrival of their reinforce-

ments, had charged and discomfited them, and had captured some of their chiefs, who were to be sent as prisoners immediately to the shah's camp.

Our business being thus concluded, there remained for us only to rejoin his majesty, which we did by more easy marches ; and after ascending the hills into the Koordish states, upon the afternoon of the memorable eighth of June, 1747, we reached the royal army just as it was arriving in the vicinity of a small village named Futehabad, situated about four miles from the town of Kha-booshan, and where the camp was ordered to be pitched for the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

THE shah, who upon this occasion had advanced with so much rapidity that the royal pavilions had not as yet been got ready for his reception, was seated under a temporary semi-aneh, surrounded by his chief officers and guards ; and, as appeared from his countenance and actions, in worse than ordinary humour, for already the ground in front of the royal seat was sprinkled with the blood of those whose countenances had been mutilated or put to death by his orders ; and one or two strangled corpses lay dragged by the heels to a side beyond the circle of soldiers.

When I approached to make my obeisance and report, he scarce deigned to acknowledge his slave ; but inquired with a stern voice how many rebels had felt the sword of justice ?—he hoped it had not been spared. On Hadjee Beg Khan

and myself declaring that a great many of the rebels had suffered the punishment of their crimes, and that several prisoners of distinction, both Kadjers and Toorkomans, had been brought in to wait the royal pleasure, he expressed again satisfaction. "The ghorumsaugs of Koords, it seemed, had again been eating filth," he said; and he meant to provide them with a sharp sauce for their meal. "We shall have another handsome minâr of heads here I foresee," added he; "and the long beards of these Kadjer villains you have brought will add greatly to its beauty."

The terrible smile which convulsed rather than relaxed his features, as in tones of bitter mockery he uttered this savage jest, made even those best accustomed to his excesses of cruelty shudder with horror. A more than usual gloom brooded over the whole assembly, which irritated and exacerbated if possible the devilish ill humour of the shah; and he sought to vent it in increased and extraordinary atrocities. In truth, the conduct and demeanour of Nadir on this eventful evening betrayed an utterly dis-tempered mind. And if ever the unconscious indications of approaching fate are to be traced in the yet living and secure man, they were written on the aspect and deportment of the shah this fatal day.

His countenance, once so serenely composed and noble in its expression, had, long ere this, from the habitual indulgence of evil passions, contracted a savage frown, which weighed upon the spirits of beholders ; while the deep-worn lines on cheek and brow, prevailing even over increased corpulency, evinced the constant load of jealous care and suspicious hatred which embittered and rankled in his mind. On this evening, these peculiarities of appearance were fearfully increased ;—his swarthy cheek was tinged with livid yellow ; the furrows on his brow were ominously dark ; his eye, rolling in its orbit, expressed the restless fever of his mind, no less than the convulsive movements of his features, and his quick, startling changes of attitude, did the corresponding uneasiness of his frame. Rapidly and suspiciously did his glance flit over the persons and countenances of his officers, as if his soul sought for a resting-place,—a single spot on which it could repose in confidence ; but the search was vain.

The durbar of Nadir had for a long time past been a scene of gloom and constraint ; for no one could tell whether he might be one moment safe from the effects of a sudden ebullition of ill humour, nor what might be the conduct most likely to secure him. Thus all for the most part stood silent and downcast, awaiting the address of

their sovereign, rather in terror than in hope ; and though an occasional facetious remark from his majesty might prove the signal for mirth and laughter, it was a merriment so obviously forced and constrained, as not even to deceive the ear for which it was designed—a failure which still served to increase the very evil in which that constraint had originated.

But remarkable as was at all times the painful formality of the royal durbar, a double weight of gloom seemed to brood over it on this night, and in the moody and sullen expressions of the officers and chiefs who were assembled round the throne an attentive observer might have remarked symptoms of extraordinary uneasiness. Furtive glances were cast around at one another, and the irresolute yet significant interchange of looks betokened the consciousness of some terrible impending purpose, which each sought, yet dreaded to read in the countenance of his neighbour.

So passed the time until the durbar was broken up, when the shah retired within the wall of serpurdehs which inclosed his pavilions ; and the chiefs and officers quitted the sahn before the audience-tent. Still they did not retire to their quarters, but congregated in groups, and continued in earnest conversation ; and it was afterwards remarked that the officers and chiefs of Iraun gathered themselves together in parties

distinct from those of the Oozbecks, the Toorkomans, and the Affghauns, who on their side maintained the same rule, and had their own separate consultations.

These ominous appearances in the demeanour of the shah and of his court were not without sufficient cause. By the time the king arrived at Mushed the partial disturbances of the kingdom had increased to an almost general revolt ; and to complete the series of distracting intelligence, which daily poured in upon the royal ear, tidings at length arrived that Allee Koolee Khan, the favoured nephew of the shah, into whose hands he had entrusted so much power, had joined the rebels of Seistan and Herât, whom he had been sent to reduce ; and was now publicly in arms against his uncle and his sovereign. In fact, Allee Koolee Khan, who had long watched the frantic conduct of the king, and who had convinced himself that the only way to stop the effusion of blood throughout the empire, and to restore it in some degree to tranquillity, was to deprive him of the sovereignty, had not only taken part with the rebels, but, as the king himself had anticipated, had actually entered into correspondence with Thahmaseb Khan, in hopes of securing that officer's assistance in the development of his plans. The negotiation at first succeeded ; but whether Thahmaseb Khan found

cause to doubt the prince's sincerity, or repented of his treason to a master who had ever been indulgent to him, I know not ; it is certain, however, that the matter terminated in that officer's death, by poison, it is said, administered by the order of Allee Koolee Khan. God knows the truth.

The revolt of his nephew put the finishing stroke to the firmness, and even to the already shattered intellects of Nadir : his mind became filled with wild and extravagant plans of revenge. Sensible, doubtless, that a crisis was at hand, he despatched his sons, Nasr-Ullah Meerza, Shah Rokh Meerza, and others, along with much of his valuable movables and jewels, together with the greater number of his women, to the fortress of Kelaat, whither the chief part of his Indian plunder, and his treasures of gold and silver, had been previously transported. He then made systematic arrangements for the remainder of his earthly career ; and assuredly the history of the world might be searched in vain for a parallel to the atrocity and frantic wildness of his meditated project.

Perfectly aware of the extreme disgust which his conduct had engendered in the minds of the Persian people, as well as in the army, he could no longer feel in them the confidence which he was conscious of having forfeited ; and consequently he had for some time past been gradually

withdrawing his favour and his trust from both officers and soldiers of that nation, transferring it to his foreign troops, the Oozbecks, the Toorkomans, and the Affghauns, who had enlisted during the Indian expedition, as well as on subsequent occasions. These, both officers and men, he strove to attach, both by presents and promises, to his interest ; and he now resolved to put their zeal to a desperate test.

Assembling secretly the chiefs of these various troops, he disclosed to them his horrible plot, which was, that at a particular time, when the Persian troops should be off their guard, these Oozbecks, Affghauns, and Toorkomans, should, on a given signal, rush sword-in-hand upon them, and cut the whole to pieces ; after which he promised to load them with honours, and dismiss them to their own homes ; while he, tired of the world and its villanies, would retire with a chosen band of followers and end his days in the fortress of Kelaat.

That a project so monstrous should ever have been conceived by the mind of man, may at first appear impossible. But when we call to mind the diseased and shattered condition of Nadir's intellects, the incredibility will disappear. And although it might be a difficult thing to produce palpable and undeniable evidence of the fact, because every individual concerned in maturing the

intended plot or proposed to be made an agent in its execution, has since been removed from the land, still assurance that such a plot existed rests upon authority which can scarcely be doubted. Such, at all events, was the firm belief of every one with whom I have conversed on the subject. For my own part, duty detained me happily at a distance, while the sanguinary intrigues of this critical period were in process of organization ; nor did I return till they were upon the eve of completion.

It was by the mercy of Providence that this atrocious plot was discovered. Reports differ on the mode ; but it was said, that a consultation between two chiefs concerned in its execution, and detailing some particulars connected with it, was accidentally overheard by a Georgian slave, who instantly conveyed the information to some of the principal Persian officers. Probably the communication only hastened a catastrophe which had for some time been in contemplation.

That Allee Koolee Khan, the shah's nephew, was already at this time in correspondence with several of the nobles at court, upon the subject of removing their cruel master by assassination, is not denied, even by himself:—that the plot had attained some consistence, and was instantly forced into maturity by this discovery, appears equally certain. Of the conspirators, Mahomed

Saleh Khan, and Mahomed Koolee Khan, both chiefs of the king's own tribe, and one of them in immediate command of the body-guard, were the principal, and with these were associated Mahomed Khan of Erivan, Moossa Beg Taremee, and Kouchah Beg of the Gondoozloo tribe, together with a certain number of soldiers of the body-guard itself, who treacherously scrupled not to betray the monarch whom they had sworn to protect!—Again, I thank the Almighty, that this foul plot was not made known to me:—never should I have agreed to betray my unfortunate master: and yet how on the other hand could I have consented to the scenes of blood and slaughter which his continued existence must have caused; and which sooner or later must have terminated in his own violent death?

It was on the very day before my arrival in camp at Futehabad that this conspiracy had been finally concluded.—On this very night, on the other hand, and in this very place, had the ruthless shah resolved to complete his horrible project, and massacre all the Persians in camp,—my friends and brothers in arms, myself doubtless among them. But the term of the hero's and the tyrant's destiny was completed:—the measure of his guilt was full, and God would not permit the meditated and monstrous crime.

To an observant eye, even though totally un-

acquainted with the rumours of existing conspiracies, the arrangement of the camp and the relative positions of its several divisions might have afforded matter of surprise, and even of suspicion; for the troops immediately around the royal quarters were principally Oozbecks, while the Affghauns and Toorkomans occupied the upper part of the slope upon which the camp was pitched, in such a manner, that the divisions assigned to the Persian troops should, in case of an uproar, lie inclosed between two fires. It was asserted that the Toorkomans and Affghauns were observed whetting their scimitars according to the custom before an action; and this circumstance did not escape the observation of those who knew what was in contemplation.

Notwithstanding the dark treasons and jealous alarms, which rendered the camp no unapt similitude of a mine about to be sprung, the night sunk down in tranquillity and silence; nor could a stranger have imagined that a catastrophe, involving the fate of a great empire and of many thousand human lives, was on the eve, nay, at the very moment of occurrence. Fatigued with the sustained exertions and agitating incidents of the late expedition, I had retired to rest, and was enjoying a profound repose, when one of my most attached followers and guards ran into the tent, and hastily aroused me:—"Arise, arise, my lord,"

said he ; “ the camp is in a tumult, and wild cries are heard in the direction of the royal quarters.” Starting up, I was shaking myself, to throw off the heaviness of sleep, for I scarcely comprehended the man’s words, when in rushed Noor Mahomed, exclaiming, ere he well reached the door-way, “ In the name of God, Ismael, arise ! the camp is in horrible confusion : they say the shah has been murdered !”

Effectually roused by the bare mention of such an alarming rumour, I hastily threw on my coat of mail and a few clothes, and catching up my arms, ran with Noor Mahomed towards the royal pavilion. Numbers who had been startled by the same indistinct rumour were now streaming from sundry quarters in this direction, and Iraunees, Affghauns, Toorkomans, and Oozbecks, all ran thither in a mingled crowd to learn the truth. It was afterwards remembered that all the latter troops were fully armed ; a circumstance which corroborated the belief generally entertained of the intended massacre of the Persian troops on this very night.

Before the royal pavilion the confusion was already complete. The serpurdehs were torn down in many places ; a number of persons were running in and out, and blows and loud execrations were beginning to make themselves be heard. For some time our inquiries regarding what had

happened remained unanswered ; and we knew not what to think, for it was not the first alarm of the kind which had proved groundless, although never before had appearances been so alarming.

At last observing Moossa Beg, an officer of the guard, passing hastily by, although ignorant at the time of his great share in the business, I stopped and entreated him to tell the truth. “ Know ye not of it ? ” replied he, “ *tumaum shoud !* it is all over !—the bloody tyrant is dead ! ”—“ Punah-bekhodah ! can it be ? ”—“ It is true.—Mahomed Saleh Khan Affshar and the kussukchee bashee forced their way in not an hour ago, killed the eunuch of the guard, at the entrance of the sleeping tent, cut down some women, and other eunuchs, who were moving about, and sought for the shah ; but he, probably awakened and alarmed by the noise, could not immediately be found. They caught a sight of him at last by the light of a small chiraugh, and rushed towards him. But by that time he was on his guard, and while loudly calling on his own guards, actually struck down two of the gholaums who followed us, before a blow from Mahomed Saleh disabled him in some degree, and convinced him of our errand. A fearful scuffle ensued. The shah, at last tripped up I believe by a tent rope, (for in the scuffle he sought to escape from the tent, and we had by that time got to its outside,) fell, and cried out for

mercy, promising unqualified forgiveness to all concerned. “Mercy, tyrant!” said Saleh Khan, aiming at him a terrible stroke: “you never knew what it was, and you shall not now.” The blow was mortal; but he received many more wounds before we left him; and then Mahomed Saleh severed the head from the body.”

“And were you then one of them, Moossa?” exclaimed I, smitten with horror and with pity: “you an officer!—a confidential officer of his own guard!”—“What was to be done?” responded Moossa Beg, “it was come to the point with a vengeance—it was *he* or *me*, *us* I should say. Where was the room for hesitation?—besides, I had the orders of Allee Koolee Khan.”

While these words were passing hastily between us Mahomed Koolee Khan himself came hurriedly by, his clothes sprinkled with blood, and his drawn sword in his hand. “If ye desire to live till morning,” said he, “do not stand here gazing upon a broken pipkin, but fly every man to his quarters, and defend his own. The Oozbecks and Toorkomans are upon us already;—let the Iraunees look to it.” And in truth the tumult was fast thickening and swelling, and swords were flashing and musket-shots were dropping here and there. The uproar was soon repeated in other quarters of the camp. The shouts rose into a continued yell of various sounds; the musket

peals increased to a continued rattle. The gathering cries of each troop and clan were heard above the tumult. "Affshars! Beyauts! Jalloyers! Koords! to your arms! Hah, Gholaumee! keep your ground! The rascally Toorkomans and Affghauns are upon us:"—and soldiers were fast running about to find their comrades or officers.

It was full time to think of defence; for the Toorkomans, finding the camp alarmed, and seeing their hopes of plunder and carnage likely to be defeated, and doubting, or pretending to doubt, the rumours that were now spreading fast, of the shah's death, assailed the Persian troops in several quarters; while Ahmed Khan Abdallee, an officer of late high in the favour and confidence of Nadir, made a decided and furious attack with his Affgauns and some Oozbecks upon the Affshars of the guard. But the Affshars, a steady well-disciplined body, were too much experienced in their duty to be easily surprised; and being the stoutest soldiers in the army, they not only resisted, but repelled their assailants with more loss than they themselves sustained. Fires, the invariable attendants upon a tumult, began to arise; tents fell, horses and other animals broke loose, and ran wildly and terrified about. To preserve life, and secure as much plunder as possible from the wreck of affairs, was all that men now thought of. Thus passed this terrible night; another like which

would suffice to turn the dark hair of youth to silver, and to wither the strength of mature years to the imbecility of age.

The morning dawned upon a spectacle of confusion, pillage, and bloodshed, which the mind cannot imagine, nor the pen describe ; and which, from being so sudden and totally unexpected, was the more striking and appalling. Of the lofty and magnificent pavilions of the shah, scarce a vestige remained, except the torn serpurdehs and walls which lay scattered about, with a part of one of the harem tents still hanging upon its broken pole. Of those belonging to the chief officers of the army, most were in a similar condition, except in those quarters where the inmates, being on their guard, had manfully resisted their assailants ; and among these was that of the Affshars. The lines and streets between the tents were encumbered with dead bodies ; which, to the amount of many thousands, lay strewed throughout the camp. The smoke of the dying fires still faintly rose upwards ; and fragments of pillaged goods were thickly scattered over the whole ground. Among this hideous scene swarmed thousands of fierce and armed men, still thirsting for each other's lives ; still threatening their former comrades with the arms which, till now, had been wielded in each other's defence. Such was this awful transmutation ; a single night—nay, a few hours, had

reduced the well-ordered arrangement and admirable organization of the camp to this frightful condition. On the life of a single man hung all this mighty change. The brilliant hour of summer sunshine, succeeded by the wildest storm of winter, affords not an adequate image of its horrors. It was like the day of eternal doom succeeding to the joys of Paradise.

The increasing light of day, however, appeared to calm, in some measure, and to restore to reason the sundry furious factions, who, having tried their strength in the medley of a night encounter, and having found that little was to be gained, while much was to be lost by further violence, now drew off to parley and negotiate. But while each party stood thus on guard, surlily glaring on each other like lions breathing from a first encounter, and eyeing the strength and preparation of their respective adversaries before recommencing the combat, a cry of inquiry arose of, "where is the body of the shah?—is he in reality dead?" And the Toorkomans and Affghauns, upon whom the blow could not fail of falling with most severity, were the loudest in calling out for satisfaction upon this important point.

The principal leaders of each corps were now called upon in a tumultuous manner to stand forward, and proceeded at the common voice to search for the corse. It was found after a while,

lying half naked upon the ground, among the ruins of the harem pavilion: the only living thing near it was an old woman, who sat lamenting over the severed head. At sight of these bloody tokens, which were instantly brought forth and produced to the foreign troops, who soon assembled in their respective corps, a mist seemed to fall from their eyes. They now felt palpably, what before they had not perceived, that their power had passed away, and with it their security; that the spell which had incorporated them, and identified them with the sons and the soldiers of another land, and almost given it into their possession, was for ever broken; and that they now stood alone, unsupported, among those who had ceased to be their comrades and friends.

At once, Toorkomans, Affghauns, and Oozbecks, were panic struck, hung their heads, and slunk away confounded. Ahmed Khan Abdallee in that same hour, mustering together the forces of his countrymen, and hastily loading themselves with such plunder as they had collected, withdrew by the road to Kandahar. The Oozbecks and Toorkomans quitted the field with full as much celerity, but less order, and retired towards their own countries, pillaging and plundering as they went. The greater part of the Persian troops, Georgians, Lesghees, Buchtiarees, men of Azerbijaun, of Fars, Irâk, and other quarters, dispersed,

loaded with whatever spoil they could secure, to seek their several homes ; if haply any such remained to men who, for so many years, had known no abode but the camp, no country but that which at the moment they were led to conquer.

Before noon of the following day nine-tenths of that mighty host, which had subdued the whole of Persia, Affghanistan, and India, Bockhara, Balkh, and Khaurezm,—which had quelled the insolence of the Osmanlees, and bridled the ambition of the northern Czars,—had dispersed like yellow leaves before the breath of winter—had melted like hoar-frost when the sun breaks forth and drinks it up ; and with it the magnificent empire which it had formed and upheld, crumbled in a moment into dust !

The Affshars, Koords, and Jalloyers, natives of the place where the catastrophe took place, alone remained upon the ground ; and they, quickly gathering together the wreck of the camp, departed on the following day. Some, desirous to watch the consequences of this sudden event, retired to their villages or mountains : others marched off in a body at once to meet with Allee Koolee Khan, to whom a confidential messenger was despatched by the conspirators, in charge of the shah's head. It is worthy of remark that this head, though so carefully sent, never reached the hands for which it was intended : it was actually

lost or stolen by the way. But murders were so common, and carcasses of the dead so abundant, that the messenger found no difficulty in replacing the true head by that of some other person, sufficiently resembling the deceased king to impose upon his nephew ; a measure important to save his credit, perhaps his own head.

Of the prodigious treasure and riches which, in spite of all that had been sent to Kelaat, the shah's tents must have contained, no account was ever heard, although the celebrated peacock throne, the no less splendid and remarkable pavilion of pearls, and fine sets of horse furniture, set and mounted with jewels of prodigious value, were known to have been among the royal baggage, together with an infinite quantity of other precious commodities. When the confusion commenced, the neighbouring peasantry came down, and mingled themselves among the soldiers ; and, avoiding the fray as much as they could, plunged into the royal quarters, and appropriated no small share of the booty.

For myself, stunned as I was by this overwhelming calamity, what course remained for me to take ? For more than twenty years had the camp been my home : its duties, its occupations, my pride and my delight. I had witnessed this gallant army in its rise and progress to the maturity of that perfection which astonished all the

east, and made its soldiers as creatures of another world. My own eyes had seen that glorious army destroyed, dispersed, annihilated; as a bubble that sparkles in the light, and then bursts into nothing;—as a mist of the morning, which melts before the rising sun, and is seen no more. Nor was this effected by the slow wasting hand of disease, the gradual operation of political events, nor even by the swift sword of a more fortunate foe. They were withered by the poisonous workings of accursed treason: the suicidal frenzy of intestine jealousy smote them in their pride. I had witnessed the dismal spectacle of old and well-tried comrades turning their swords against each other; and had been forced to defend my person against the blows of those by whose side I had so often fought like a brother. All now were slain or fled: the chain which had bound us was broken; the spell that formed the enchantment of our lives was dissolved; the pageant had faded away!

Heart-stricken and full of grief, as much for a master, whom, in spite of all his faults, I still venerated and loved, as for friends and comrades lost, and the bright visions of existence thus cruelly dispelled, I mustered together my dependants and followers, and accompanied by Noor Mahomed with his adherents, took the way to my government of Karaboulagh; there, like many of the servants

of the late shah, to watch the current of events, and endeavour to preserve the tranquillity of the district, and the properties and lives of its inhabitants, who looked up to me for protection.

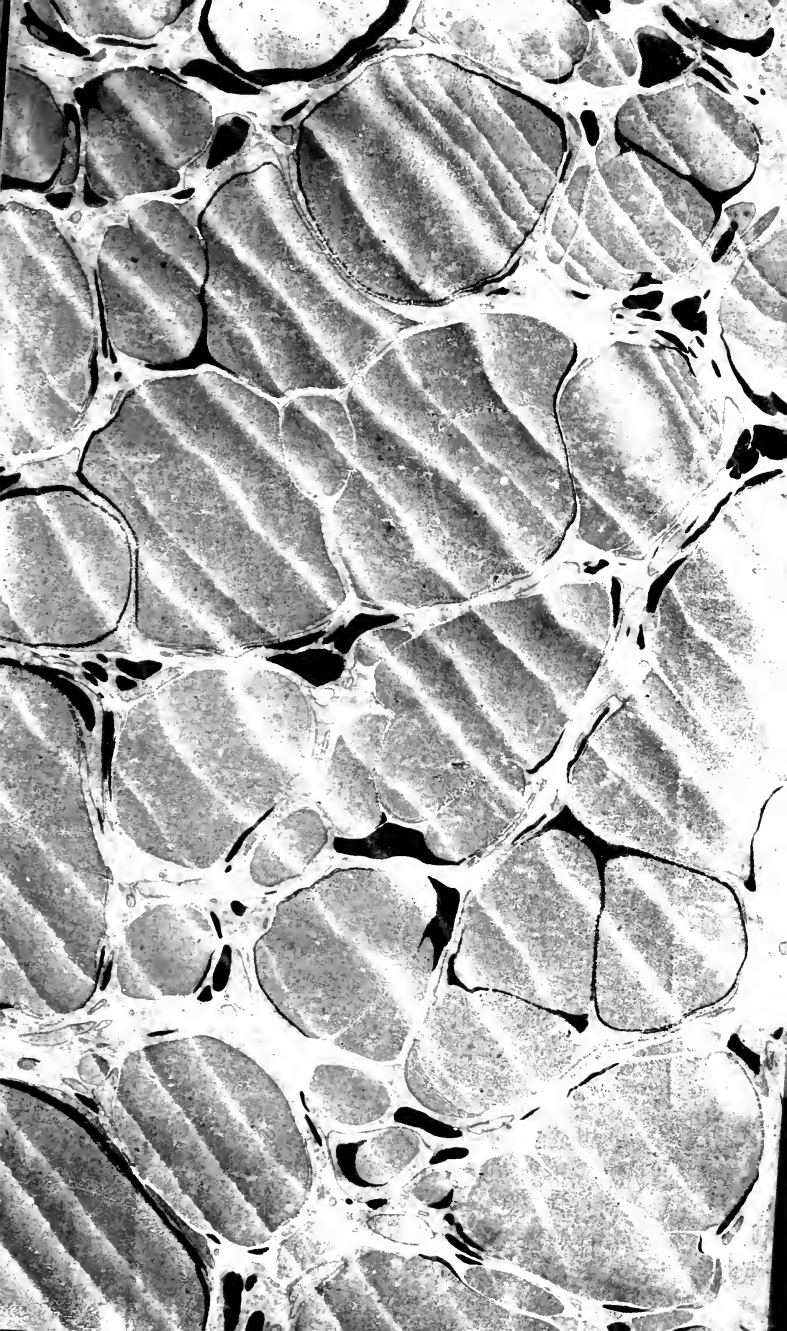
And now, gentle reader, the Kuzzilbash having reached that period, which, as he himself observes, effected a complete revolution, not only in his own, but in the destinies of an empire, finally and humbly takes leave of those who have honoured him by their attention thus far. It would be tedious and unprofitable to follow his account of the petty struggles and revolting crimes which alone characterised the stormy and ephemeral reigns of the great conqueror's immediate successors ; nor need the translator pursue his task into the minute account which his author gives of his domestic history from this period until the comparative calm which ensued upon the succession of Shah Rokh, the amiable but unfortunate grandson of Nadir, to the throne of Khorasan. At that time, induced by the comparative tranquillity of the province, and his wish to avoid all interference in the struggles which distracted the more southern districts of Persia, it appears that he finally removed with his family into his government of Karaboulagh, which was continued to him by the favour of his mighty master's grandson ; and which,

as he tells us, he contrived to maintain unharmed against the frequently repeated attacks of his old friends and enemies the Toorkomans of the Desert. The chief interest of the narrative, if any it be allowed to possess, terminates here ; and here, therefore, let the curtain drop. If the sketches of scenery, of manners, or of character, attempted in these pages, shall in any degree tend to excite in the mind of the English reader an interest for countries comparatively little known, but not unworthy of being more so, the task will not have been performed in vain, nor will the labour it has cost go unrewarded.

THE END.







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